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Romances of the French Revolution

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RAFAEL SABATINI

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Romances of the French Revolution

by

RAFAEL SABATINI

SCARAMOUCHE
SCARAMOUCHE THE KINGMAKER
NUPTIALS OF CORBAL

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Scaramouche

Hommes sensibles qui pleurent sur les maux de la Révolution versent donc aussi quelques larmes sur les maux qui l'ont amenée.

—MICHELET.

BOOK I
THE ROBE
CHAPTER I

THE REPUBLICAN

HE was born with a gift of laughter and a sense that the world was mad. And that was all his patrimony. His very paternity was obscure, although the village of Gavrillac had long since dispelled the cloud of mystery that hung about it. Those simple Brittany folk were not so simple as to be deceived by a pretended relationship which did not even possess the virtue of originality. When a nobleman, for no apparent reason, announces himself the godfather of an infant fetched no man knew whence, and thereafter cares for the lad's rearing and education, the most unsophisticated of country folk perfectly understand the situation. And so the good people of Gavrillac permitted themselves no illusions on the score of the real relationship between André-Louis Moreau—as the lad had named—and Quintin de Kercadiou, Lord of Gavrillac, who dwelt in the big grey house that dominated from its eminence the village clustering below.

André-Louis had learnt his letters at the village school, lodged the while with old Rabouillet, the attorney, who in the capacity of fiscal attendant looked after the affairs of M. de Kercadiou. Thereafter, at the age of fifteen, he had been packed off to Paris, to the Lycée of Louis Le Grand, to study law, which he was now returned to practise in conjunction with Rabouillet. All this at the charges of his grandfather, M. de Kercadiou, who by placing him once more under the tutelage of Rabouillet would seem thereby quite clearly to be making provision for his future.

André-Louis, on his side, had made the most of his opportunities. You behold him at the age of four-and-twenty stuffed with learning enough to produce an intellectual indigestion in an ordinary mind. Out of his zestful study of Man, from

Thucydides to the Encyclopædists, from Seneca to Rousseau, he had confirmed into an unassailable conviction his earliest conscious impressions of the general insanity of his own species. Nor can I discover that anything in his eventful life ever afterwards caused him to waver in that opinion.

In body he was a slight wisp of a fellow, scarcely above middle height, with a lean, astute countenance, prominent of nose and cheek-bones, and with lank, black hair that reached almost to his shoulders. His mouth was long, thin-lipped and humorous. He was only just redeemed from ugliness by the splendour of a pair of ever-questing, luminous eyes, so dark as to be almost black. Of the whimsical quality of his mind and his rare gift of graceful expression, his writings—unfortunately but too scanty—and particularly his Confessions, afford us very ample evidence. Of his gift of oratory he was hardly conscious yet, although he had already achieved a certain fame for it in the literary Chamber of Rennes—one of those clubs by now ubiquitous in the land, in which the intellectual youth of France forgathered to study and discuss the new philosophies that were permeating social life. But the fame he had acquired there was hardly enviable. He was too impish, too caustic, too much disposed—so thought his colleagues—to ridicule their sublime theories for the regeneration of mankind. Himself he protested that he merely held up to them the mirror of truth, and that it was not his fault if when reflected there they looked ridiculous.

All that he achieved by this, as you conceive, was to exasperate; and to such an extent, that his expulsion from the Literary Chamber was under serious consideration, and seemed at last to be rendered inevitable by the fact that the Lord of Gavrillac had appointed him his delegate in the States of Brittany. It was felt almost unanimously that there was no room for the official representative of a nobleman, for a man of such avowed reactionary principles, in a society devoted to social reform.

This was no time for half-measures. The light of hope which had begun to glow upon the horizon when M. Necker had at last persuaded the King to convoke the States General—a thing that had not happened for nearly two hundred years—had lately been overcast by the insolence of the nobility and clergy, who were determined that these States General should be composed so as to safeguard their own privileges.

The prosperous, industrious maritime city of Nantes—the first to express the feeling that was now rapidly spreading throughout the land—had issued in the first days of that November of 1788 a manifesto, which it had constrained the municipality to place before the King. It was not intended that the States of

Brittany about to sit in Rennes should be, as in the past, a mere instrument of the nobility and clergy, and that the Third Estate should have no voice or power save that of voting subsidies as bidden. To make an end of the bitter anomaly which placed the whole of the power in the hands of those who paid no taxes, the manifesto demanded that the Third Estate should be represented by one deputy for every ten thousand inhabitants: that this deputy should be drawn strictly from the class he was to represent, and that he should not be a nobleman, or the delegate, seneschal, attorney or intendant of a nobleman; that the representatives of the Third Estate should be of a number equal to that of the other two estates, and that upon all matters the votes should be by heads, and not, as hitherto, by orders.

This manifesto, containing some further but secondary demands, gave elegant triflers in the *Œil de Bœuf* at Versailles a disconcerting glimpse of the things to which M. Necker was venturing to open the door. If their will had prevailed, the answer to that manifesto is not difficult to surmise. But M. Necker was the pilot endeavouring to make harbour with the foundering ship of the State. Upon his advice the King's Majesty had referred the matter back to the States of Brittany for settlement, but with the significant promise to intervene should the privileged orders—the nobility and the clergy—resist the popular demands. And the privileged orders, rushing blindly upon destruction, had, of course, resisted, whereupon the King had adjourned the States.

But now, if you please, the privileged orders refused to be adjourned, refused to bow to the authority of the sovereign. They would sit in despite of it, ignoring it, and they would proceed with the elections in their own fashion, and thus make sure of safeguarding their privileges and continuing their rapine.

Coming on a November morning to Gavrillac laden with the news of this, Philippe de Vilmorin, a divinity student from the seminary of Rennes and a popular member of the Literary Chamber, found in that sleepy Bréton village matter to quicken his already lively indignation. A peasant of Gavrillac, named Mabey, had been shot dead that morning in the woods of Meupont, across the river, by a gamekeeper of the Marquis de La Tour d'Azyr. The unfortunate fellow had been caught in the act of taking a pheasant from a snare, and the gamekeeper had acted under explicit orders from his master.

Infuriated by an act of tyranny so absolute and merciless, M. de Vilmorin proposed to lay the matter before M. de Kercadiou. Mabey was a vassal of Gavrillac, and Vilmorin hoped to move the Lord of Gavrillac to demand at least some measure

of reparation for the widow and the three orphans which that brutal deed had made.

But because André-Louis was Philippe's dearest friend—indeed, his almost brother—the young seminarist sought him out in the first instance. He found him at breakfast alone in the long, low-ceilinged, white-panelled dining-room at Rabouillet's—the only home that André-Louis had ever known—and after embracing him, deafened him with his denunciation of M. de La Tour d'Azyr.

"I have heard of it already," said André-Louis.

"You say it as if the thing occasioned no surprise," his friend reproached him.

"Nothing beastly can surprise me when done by a beast. And La Tour d'Azyr is a beast, as all the world knows. The more fool Mabey for stealing his pheasants. He should have stolen somebody else's."

"Is that all you have to say about it?"

"What more is there to say? I've a practical mind, I hope."

"What more there is to say I propose to say to your godfather, M. de Kercadiou. I shall appeal to him for justice."

"Against M. de La Tour d'Azyr?" André-Louis raised his eyebrows.

"Why not?"

"My dear ingenuous Philippe, dog doesn't eat dog."

"You are unjust to your godfather. He is a humane man."

"Oh, as humane as you please. But this isn't a question of humanity, it's a question of game-laws."

M. de Vilmorin tossed his long arms to Heaven in disgust. He was a tall, slender young gentleman, a year or two younger than André-Louis. He was very soberly dressed in black, as became a seminarist, with white bands at wrists and throat and silver buckles to his shoes. His neatly clubbed brown hair was innocent of powder.

"You talk like a lawyer," he exploded.

"Naturally. But don't waste anger on me on that account. Tell me what you want me to do?"

"I want you to come to M. de Kercadiou with me, and to use your influence to obtain justice. I suppose I am asking too much?"

"My dear Philippe, I exist to serve you. I warn you that it is a futile quest; but give me leave to finish my breakfast, and I am at your orders."

M. de Vilmorin dropped into a winged arm-chair by the well-swept hearth, on which a piled-up fire of pine-logs was

burning cheerily. And whilst he waited he gave his friend the latest news of the events in Rennes. Young, ardent, enthusiastic and inspired by Utopian ideals, he passionately denounced the rebellious attitude of the privileged.

André-Louis, already fully aware of the trend of feeling in the ranks of an order in whose deliberations he took part as the representative of a nobleman, was not at all surprised by what he heard. M. de Vilmorin found it exasperating that his friend should apparently decline to share his own indignation.

"Don't you see what it means?" he cried. "The nobles, by disobeying the King, are striking at the very foundations of the throne. Don't they perceive that their very existence depends upon it; that if the throne falls over, it is they who stand nearest to it who will be crushed? Don't they see that?"

"Evidently not. They are just governing classes, and I never heard of governing classes that had eyes for anything but their own profit."

"That is our grievance. That is what we are going to change."

"You are going to abolish governing classes? An interesting experiment. I believe it was the original plan of creation, and it might have succeeded but for Cain."

"What we are going to do," said M. de Vilmorin, curbing his exasperation, "is to transfer the government to other hands."

"And you think that will make a difference?"

"I know it will."

"Ah! I take it that being now in minor orders, you already possess the confidence of the Almighty. He will have confided to you His intention of changing the pattern of mankind."

M. de Vilmorin's fine ascetic face grew overcast.

"You are profane, André," he reproved his friend.

"I assure you that I am quite serious. To do what you imply would require nothing short of divine intervention. You must change man, not systems. Can you and our vapouring friends of the Literary Chamber of Rennes, or any other learned society of France, devise a system of government that has never yet been tried? Surely not. And can they say of any system tried that it proved other than a failure in the end? My dear Philippe, the future is to be read with certainty only in the past. *Ab actu ad posse valet consecutio*. Man never changes. He is always greedy, always acquisitive, always vile. I am speaking of Man in the bulk."

"Do you pretend that it is impossible to ameliorate the lot of the people?" M. de Vilmorin challenged him.

"When you say the people, you mean, of course, the populace."

Will you abolish it? That is the only way to ameliorate its lot, for as long as it remains populace its lot will be damnation."

"You argue, of course, for the side that employs you. That is natural, I suppose." M. de Vilmorin spoke between sorrow and indignation.

"On the contrary, I seek to argue with absolute detachment. Let us test these ideas of yours. To what form of government do you aspire? A republic, it is to be inferred from what you have said. Well, you have it already. France in reality is a republic to-day."

Philippe stared at him. "You are being paradoxical, I think. What of the King?"

"The King? All the world knows there has been no King in France since Louis XIV. There is an obese gentleman at Versailles, who wears the crown, but the very news you bring shows for how little he really counts. It is the nobles and clergy who sit in the high places, with the people of France harnessed under their feet, who are the real rulers. That is why I say that France is a republic; she is a republic built on the best pattern—the Roman pattern. Then, as now, there were great patrician families in luxury, preserving for themselves power and wealth, and what else is accounted worth possessing; and there was the populace crushed and groaning, sweating, bleeding, starving and perishing in the Roman kennels. That was a republic; the mightiest we have seen."

Philippe strove with his impatience. "At least you will admit—you have, in fact, admitted it—that we could not be worse governed than we are?"

"That is not the point. The point is, should we be better governed if we replaced the present ruling class by another? Without some guarantee of that, I should be the last to lift a finger to effect a change. And what guarantee can you give? What is the class that aims at government? I will tell you. The bourgeoisie."

"What?"

"That startles you, eh? Truth is so often disconcerting. You hadn't thought of it? Well, think of it now. Look well into this Nantes manifesto. Who are the authors of it?"

"I can tell you who it was constrained the municipality of Nantes to send it to the King. Some ten thousand workmen—shipwrights, weavers, labourers and artisans of every kind."

"Stimulated to it, driven to it, by their employers, the wealthy traders and ship-owners of that city," André-Louis replied. "I have a habit of observing things at close quarters,

which is why our colleagues of the Literary Chamber dislike me so cordially in debate. Where I delve they but skim. Behind those labourers and artisans of Nantes, counselling them, urging on these poor, stupid, ignorant toilers to shed their blood in pursuit of the will o' the wisp of freedom, are the sail-makers, the spinners, the ship-owners and the slave-traders. The slave-traders! The men who live and grow rich by a traffic in human flesh and blood in the colonies are conducting at home a campaign in the sacred name of liberty! Don't you see that the whole movement is a movement of hucksters and traders and peddling vassals swollen by wealth into envy of the power that lies in birth alone? The money-changers in Paris who hold the bonds in the national debt, seeing the parlous financial condition of the State, tremble at the thought that it may lie in the power of a single man to cancel the debt of bankruptcy. To secure themselves, they are burrowing underground to overthrow a State and build upon its ruins a new one in which they shall be the masters. And to accomplish this they inflame the people. Already in Dauphiny we have seen blood run like water—the blood of the populace, always the blood of the populace. Now in Brittany we may see the like. And if in the end the new ideas prevail? If the seigniorial rule is overthrown, what then? You will have exchanged an aristocracy for a plutocracy. Is that worth while? Do you think that under money-changers and slave-traders and men who have waxed rich in other ways by the ignoble arts of buying and selling, the lot of the people will be any better than under their priests and nobles? Has it ever occurred to you, Philippe, what it is that makes the rule of the nobles so intolerable? Acquisitiveness. Acquisitiveness is the curse of mankind. And shall you expect less acquisitiveness in men who have built themselves up by acquisitiveness? Oh, I am ready to admit that the present government is execrable, unjust, tyrannical—what you will—but I beg you to look ahead, and to see that the government for which it is aimed at exchanging it may be infinitely worse."

Philippe sat thoughtful a moment. Then he returned to the attack.

"You do not speak of the abuses, the horrible, intolerable abuses of power under which we labour at present."

"Where there is power there will always be the abuse of it."

"Not if the tenure of power is dependent upon its equitable administration."

"The tenure of power is power. We cannot dictate to those who hold it."

"The people can—the people in its might."

"Again I ask you, when you say the people, do you mean the populace? You do. What power can the populace wield? It can run wild. It can burn and slay for a time. But enduring power it cannot wield, because power demands qualities which the populace does not possess, or it would not be populace. The inevitable, tragic corollary of civilisation is populace. For the rest, abuses can be corrected by equity; and equity, if it is not found in the enlightened, is not to be found at all. M. Necker is to set about correcting abuses, and limiting privileges. That is decided. To that end the States General are to assemble."

"And a promising beginning we have made in Brittany, as Heaven hears me," cried Philippe.

"Pooh! That is nothing. Naturally the nobles will not yield without a struggle. It is a futile and ridiculous struggle—but then . . . it is human nature, I suppose, to be futile and ridiculous."

M. de Vilmorin became witheringly sarcastic. "Probably you will also qualify the shooting of Mabey as futile and ridiculous? I should even be prepared to hear you argue in defence of the Marquis de La Tour d'Azyr that his gamekeeper was merciful in shooting Mabey, since the alternative would have been a life-sentence to the galleys."

André-Louis drank the remainder of his chocolate; set down his cup, and pushed back his chair, his breakfast done.

"I confess that I have not your big charity, my dear Philippe. I am touched by Mabey's fate. But, having conquered the shock of this news to my emotions, I do not forget that, after all, Mabey was thieving when he met his death."

M. de Vilmorin heaved himself up in his indignation.

"That is the point of view to be expected in one who is the assistant fiscal intendant of a nobleman, and the delegate of a nobleman to the States of Brittany."

"Philippe, is that just? You are angry with me!" he cried, in real solicitude.

"I am hurt," Vilmorin admitted. "I am deeply hurt by your attitude. And I am not alone in resenting your reactionary tendencies. Do you know that the Literary Chamber is seriously considering your expulsion?"

André-Louis shrugged. "That neither surprises nor troubles me."

M. de Vilmorin swept on, passionately: "Sometimes I think that you have no heart. With you it is always the law, never equity. It occurs to me, André, that I was mistaken in coming to you. You are not likely to be of assistance to me in my interview with M. de Kercadiou." He took up his hat.

clearly with the intention of departing. André-Louis sprang up and caught him by the arm.

"I vow," said he, "that this is the last time ever I shall consent to talk law or politics with you, Philippe. I love you too well to quarrel with you over other men's affairs."

"But I make them my own," Philippe insisted, vehemently.

"Of course you do, and I love you for it. It is right that you should. You are to be a priest; and everybody's business is a priest's business. Whereas I am a lawyer—the fiscal intendant of a nobleman, as you say—and a lawyer's business is the business of his client. That is the difference between us. Nevertheless, you are not going to shake me off."

"But I tell you frankly, now that I come to think of it, that I should prefer you did not see M. de Kercadiou with me. Your duty to your client cannot be a help to me." His wrath had passed; but his determination remained firm, based upon the reason he gave.

"Very well," said André-Louis. "It shall be as you please. But nothing shall prevent me at least from walking with you as far as the château, and waiting for you while you make your appeal to M. de Kercadiou."

And so they left the house good friends, for the sweetness of M. de Vilmorin's nature did not admit of rancour, and together they took their way up the steep main street of Gavrillac.

CHAPTER II

THE ARISTOCRAT

THE sleepy village of Gavrillac, a half-league removed from the main road to Rennes, and therefore undisturbed by the world's traffic, lay in a curve of the River Meu, at the base, and straggling half-way up the slope of the shallow hill that was crowned by the squat manor. By the time Gavrillac had paid tribute to its seigneur—partly in money and partly in service—tithes to the Church and imposts to the King, it was hard put to it to keep body and soul together with what remained. Yet hard as conditions were in Gavrillac, they were not so hard as in many other parts of France; not half so hard, for instance, as with the wretched feudatories of the great lord of La Tour d'Azyr, whose vast possessions were at one point separated from this little village by the waters of the Meu.

The Château de Gavrillac owed such seigneurial airs as might be claimed for it to its dominant position above the

village rather than to any feature of its own. Built of granite, like all the rest of Gavrillic, though mellowed by some three centuries of existence, it was a squat, flat-fronted edifice of two stories, each lighted by four windows with external wooded shutters, and flanked at either end by two square towers or pavilions under extinguisher roofs. Standing well back in a garden, denuded now, but very pleasant in summer, and immediately fronted by a fine sweep of balustrated terrace, it looked what indeed it was, and always had been, the residence of unpretentious folk who found more interest in husbandry than in adventure.

Quintin de Kercadiou, Lord of Gavrillic—Seigneur de Gavrillic was all the vague title that he bore, as his forefathers had borne before him, derived no man knew whence or how—confirmed the impression that his house conveyed. Rude as the granite itself, he had never sought the experience of courts, had not even taken service in the armies of his King. He left it to his younger brother, Étienne, to represent the family in those exalted spheres. His own interests from earliest years had been centred in his woods and pastures. He hunted, and he cultivated his acres, and superficially he appeared to be little better than any of his rustic *métayers*. He kept no state, or at least no state commensurate with his position or with the tastes of his niece, Aline de Kercadiou. Aline, having spent some two years in the court atmosphere of Versailles under the ægis of her uncle Étienne, had ideas very different from those of her uncle Quintin of what was befitting seigneurial dignity. But though this only child of a third Kercadiou had exercised, ever since she was left an orphan at the early age of four, a tyrannical rule over the Lord of Gavrillic, who had been father and mother to her, she had never yet succeeded in beating down his stubbornness on that score.

She did not yet despair—persistence being a dominant note in her character—although she had been assiduously and fruitlessly at work ever since her return from the great world of Versailles, some three months ago.

She was walking on the terrace when André-Louis and M. de Vilmorin arrived. Her slight body was wrapped against the chill air in a white pelisse; her head was encased in a close-fitting bonnet, edged with white fur. It was caught tight in a knot of pale-blue ribbon on the right of her chin; on the left a long ringlet of corn-coloured hair had been permitted to escape. The keen air had whipped so much of her cheeks as was presented to it, and seemed to have added a sparkle to eyes that were of darkest blue.

André-Louis and M. de Vilmorin had been known to her from infancy. The three had been playmates once, and André-Louis—in view of his spiritual relationship with her uncle—she called her cousin. The cousinly relations had persisted between these two long after Philippe de Vilmorin had outgrown the earlier intimacy, and had become to her Monsieur de Vilmorin.

She waved her hand to them in greeting as they advanced, and stood—an entrancing picture, and fully conscious of it—to await them at the end of the terrace nearest the short avenue by which they approached.

"If you come to see monsieur my uncle, you come inopportunistically, messieurs," she told them, a certain feverishness in her air. "He is closely—oh, so very closely—engaged."

"We will wait, mademoiselle," said M. de Vilmorin, bowing gallantly over the hand she extended to him. "Indeed, who would hasten to the uncle that may tarry a moment with the niece?"

"Monsieur l'Abbé," she teased him, "when you are in orders I shall take you for my confessor. You have so ready and sympathetic an understanding."

"But no curiosity," said André-Louis. "You haven't thought of that."

"I wonder what you mean, cousin André?"

"Well you may," laughed Philippe. "For no one ever knows." And then, his glance straying across the terrace settled upon a carriage that was drawn up before the door of the château. It was a vehicle such as was often to be seen in the streets of a great city, but rarely in the country: a beautifully-sprung two-horse cabriolet of walnut, with a varnish upon it like a sheet of glass and little pastoral scenes exquisitely painted on the panels of the door. It was built to carry two persons, with a box in front for the coachman and a stand behind for the footman. This stand was now empty, but the footman paced before the door, and as he emerged from behind the vehicle into the range of M. de Vilmorin's vision, he displayed the resplendent blue and gold livery of the Marquis de La Tour d'Azyr.

"Why!" he exclaimed. "Is it M. de La Tour d'Azyr who is with your uncle?"

"It is, monsieur," said she, a world of mystery in voice and eyes, of which M. de Vilmorin observed nothing.

"Ah, pardon!" He bowed low, hat in hand. "Serviteur, mademoiselle," and he turned to depart towards the house.

"Shall I come with you, Philippe?" André-Louis called after him.

"It would be ungallant to assume that you would prefer it," said M. de Vilmorin, with a glance at Mademoiselle. "Nor do I think it would serve. If you will wait . . ."

M. de Vilmorin strode off. Mademoiselle, after a moment's blank pause, laughed ripplingly. "Now where is he going in such a hurry?"

"To see M. de La Tour d'Azyr as well as your uncle, I should say."

"But he cannot. They cannot see him. Didn't I say that they are very closely engaged? You don't ask me why, André." There was an arch mysteriousness about her, a latent something that may have been elation or amusement, or perhaps both. André-Louis could not determine it.

"Since obviously you are all eagerness to tell, why should I ask?" quoth he.

"If you are caustic I shall not tell you even if you ask. Oh yes, I will. It will teach you to treat me with the respect that is my due."

"I hope I shall never fail in that."

"Less than ever when you learn that I am very closely concerned in the visit of M. de La Tour d'Azyr. I am the object of this visit." And she looked at him with sparkling eyes and lips parted in laughter.

"The rest, you would seem to imply, is obvious. But I am a dolt, if you please, for it is not obvious to me."

"Why, stupid, he comes to ask my hand in marriage."

"Good God!" said André-Louis, and stared at her, chappfallen.

She drew back from him a little with a frown and an upward tilt of her chin. "It surprises you?"

"It disgusts me," said he, bluntly. "In fact, I don't believe it. You are amusing yourself with me."

For a moment she put aside her visible annoyance to remove his doubts. "I am quite serious, monsieur. There came a formal letter to my uncle this morning from M. de La Tour d'Azyr, announcing the visit and its object. I will not say that it did not surprise us a little. . . ."

"Oh, I see," cried André-Louis, in relief. "I understand. For a moment I had almost feared——" He broke off, looked at her, and shrugged.

"Why do you stop? You had almost feared that Versailles had been wasted upon me? That I should permit the courtship of me to be conducted like that of any village wench? It was stupid of you. I am being sought in proper form, at my uncle's hands."

"Is his consent, then, all that matters, according to Versailles?"

"What else?"

"There is your own."

She laughed. "I am a dutiful niece . . . when it suits me."

"And will it suit you to be dutiful if your uncle accepts this monstrous proposal?"

"Monstrous!" She bridled. "And why monstrous if you please?"

"For a score of reasons," he answered irritably.

"Give me one," she challenged him.

"He is twice your age."

"Hardly so much," said she.

"He is forty-five at least."

"But he looks no more than thirty. He is very handsome—so much you will admit; nor will you deny that he is very wealthy and very powerful; the greatest nobleman in Brittany. He will make me a great lady."

"God made you that, Aline."

"Come, that's better. Sometimes you can be almost polite," And she moved along the terrace, André-Louis pacing beside her.

"I can be more than that to show reason why you should not let this beast befoul the beautiful thing that God has made."

She frowned, and her lips tightened. "You are speaking of my future husband," she reproved him.

His lips tightened too; his pale face grew paler.

"And it is so? It is settled then? Your uncle is to agree? You are to be sold thus, lovelessly, into bondage to a man you do not know. I had dreamed of better things for you, Aline."

"Better than to be Marquise de La Tour d'Azyr?"

He made a gesture of exasperation. "Are men and women nothing more than names? Do the souls of them count for nothing? Is there no joy in life, no happiness, that wealth and pleasure and empty, high-sounding titles are to be its only aims? I had set you high—so high, Aline—a thing scarce earthly. There is joy in your heart, intelligence in your mind, and, as I thought, the vision that pierces husks and shams to claim the core of reality for its own. Yet you will surrender all for a parcel of make-believe. You will sell your soul and your body to be Marquise de La Tour d'Azyr."

"You are indelicate," said she, and though she frowned her eyes laughed. "And you go headlong to conclusions. My uncle will not consent to more than to allow my consent

to be sought. We understand each other, my uncle and I, I am not to be bartered like a turnip."

He stood still, facing her, his eyes aglow, a flush creeping into his pale cheeks.

"You have been torturing me to amuse yourself," he cried. "Ah well, I forgive you out of my relief."

"Again you go too fast, Cousin André. I have permitted my uncle to consent that M. le Marquis shall make his court to me. I like the look of the gentleman. I am flattered by his preference when I consider his eminence. It is an eminence that I may find it desirable to share. M. le Marquis does not look as if he were a dullard. It should be interesting to be wooed by him. It may be more interesting still to marry him, and I think, when all is considered, that I shall probably—very probably—decide to do so."

He looked at her, looked at the sweet, challenging loveliness of that childlike face so tightly framed in the oval of white fur, and all the life seemed to go out of his own countenance.

"God help you, Aline!" he groaned.

She stamped her foot. He was really very exasperating, and something presumptuous too, she thought.

"You are insolent, monsieur."

"It is never insolent to pray, Aline. And I did no more than pray, as I shall continue to do. You'll need my prayers, I think."

"You are insufferable!" She was growing angry, as he saw by the deepening frown, the heightened colour.

"That is because I suffer. Oh, Aline, little cousin, think well of what you do; think well of the realities you will be bartering for these shams—the realities that you will never know, because those cursed shams will block your way to them. When M. de La Tour d'Azyr comes to make his court, study him well; consult your fine instincts; leave your own noble nature free to judge this animal by its intuitions. Consider that. . . ."

"I consider, monsieur, that you presume upon the kindness I have always shown you. You abuse the position of toleration in which you stand. Who are you? What are you, that you should have the insolence to take this tone with me?"

He bowed, instantly his cold, detached self again, and resumed the mockery that was his natural habit.

"My congratulations, mademoiselle, upon the readiness with which you begin to adapt yourself to the great rôle you are to play."

"Do you adapt yourself also, monsieur," she retorted angrily, and turned her shoulder to him.

"To be as the dust beneath the haughty feet of Madame la Marquise? I hope I shall know my place in future."

The phrase arrested her. She turned to him again, and he perceived that her eyes were shining now suspiciously. In an instant the mockery in him was quenched in contrition.

"Lord, what a beast I am, Aline!" he cried, as he advanced. "Forgive me, if you can."

Almost had she turned to sue forgiveness from him. But his contrition removed the need.

"I'll try," said she, "provided that you undertake not to offend again."

"But I shall," said he. "I am like that. I will fight to save you from yourself if need be, whether you forgive me or not."

They were standing so, confronting each other a little breathlessly, a little defiantly, when the others issued from the porch.

First came the Marquis de La Tour d'Azyr, Count of Solz, Knight of the Orders of the Holy Ghost and Saint Louis, and Brigadier in the armies of the King. He was a tall, graceful man, upright and soldierly of carriage, with his head disdainfully set upon his shoulders. He was magnificently dressed in a full skirted coat of mulberry velvet that was laced with gold. His waistcoat, of velvet too, was of a golden apricot colour; his breeches and stockings were of black silk, and his lacquered, red-heeled shoes were buckled in diamonds. His powdered hair was tied behind in a broad ribbon of watered silk; he carried a little three-cornered hat under his arm, and a gold-hilted slender dress-sword hung at his side.

Considering him now in complete detachment, observing the magnificence of him, the elegance of his movements, the great air, blending in so extraordinary a manner disdain and graciousness, André-Louis trembled for Aline. Here was a practised, irresistible wooer, whose *bonnes fortunes* were become a by-word, a man who had hitherto been the despair of dowagers with marriageable daughters, and the desolation of husbands with attractive wives.

He was immediately followed by M. de Kercadiou, in complete contrast. On legs of the shortest, the Lord of Gavrilac carried a body that at forty-five was beginning to incline to corpulence and an enormous head containing an indifferent allotment of intelligence. His countenance was pink and blotchy, liberally branded by the small-pox which had almost extinguished him in youth. In dress he was careless to the

point of untidiness, and to this and the fact that he had never married—disregarding the first duty of a gentleman to provide himself with an heir—he owed the character of misogynist attributed to him by the countryside.

After M. de Kercadiou came M. de Vilmorin very pale and self-contained, with tight lips and an overcast brow.

To meet them, there stepped from the carriage a very elegant young gentleman, the Chevalier de Chabrilan, M. de La Tour d'Azyr's cousin, who whilst awaiting his return had watched with considerable interest—his own presence unsuspected—the perambulations of André-Louis and Mademoiselle.

Perceiving Aline, Monsieur de La Tour d'Azyr detached himself from the others, and lengthening his stride came straight across the terrace to her.

To André-Louis the Marquis inclined his head with that mixture of courtliness and condescension which he used. Socially the young lawyer stood in a curious position. By virtue of the theory of his birth, he ranked neither as noble nor as simple, but stood somewhere between the two classes, and whilst claimed by neither he was used familiarly by both. Coldly now he returned M. de La Tour d'Azyr's greeting, and discreetly removed himself to go and join his friend.

The Marquis took the hand that Mademoiselle extended to him, and bowing over it, bore it to his lips.

"Mademoiselle," he said, looking into the blue depths of her eyes, that met his gaze smiling and untroubled, "monsieur your uncle does me the honour to permit that I pay my homage to you. Will you, mademoiselle, do me the honour to receive me when I come to-morrow? I shall have something of great importance for your ear."

"Of importance, Monsieur le Marquis? You almost frighten me." But there was no fear on the serene little face in its furred hood. It was not for nothing that she had graduated in the Versailles school of artificialities.

"That," said he, "is very far from my design."

"But of importance to yourself, monsieur, or to me?"

"To us both, I hope," he answered her, a world of meaning in his fine, ardent eyes.

"You whet my curiosity, monsieur; and, of course, I am a dutiful niece. It follows that I shall be honoured to receive you."

"Not honoured, mademoiselle; you will confer the honour. To-morrow at this hour, then, I shall have the felicity to wait upon you."

He bowed again; and again he bore her fingers to his lips,

what time she curtsied. Thereupon, with no more than this formal breaking of the ice, they parted.

She was a little breathless now, a little dazzled by the beauty of the man, his princely air, and the confidence of power he seemed to radiate. Involuntarily, almost, she contrasted him with his critic—the lean and impudent André-Louis in his plain brown coat and steel-buckled shoes—and she felt guilty of an unpardonable offence in having permitted even one word of that presumptuous criticism. To-morrow M. le Marquis would come to offer her a great position, a great rank. And already she had derogated from the increase of dignity accruing to her from his very intention to translate her to so great an eminence. Not again would she suffer it; not again would she be so weak and childish as to permit André-Louis to utter his ribald comments upon a man by comparison with whom he was no better than a lackey.

Thus argued vanity and ambition with her better self; and to her vast annoyance her better self would not admit entire conviction.

Meanwhile, M. de La Tour d'Azyr was climbing into his carriage. He had spoken a word of farewell to M. de Kercadiou and he had also had a word for M. de Vilmorin, in reply to which M. de Vilmorin had bowed in assenting silence.

The carriage rolled away, the powdered footman in blue and gold very stiff behind it, M. de La Tour d'Azyr bowing to Mademoiselle, who waved to him in answer.

Then M. de Vilmorin put his arm through that of André-Louis, and said to him:

"Come, André."

"But you'll stay to dine, both of you," cried the hospitable Lord of Gavrilac. "We'll drink a certain toast," he added, winking an eye that strayed towards Mademoiselle, who was approaching. He had no subtleties, good soul that he was.

M. de Vilmorin deplored an appointment that prevented him doing himself the honour. He was very stiff and formal.

"And you, André?"

"I? Oh, I share the appointment, godfather," he lied, "and I have a superstition against toasts." He had no wish to remain. He was angry with Aline for her smiling reception of M. de La Tour d'Azyr, and the sordid bargain he saw her set on making. He was suffering from the loss of an illusion.

CHAPTER III

THE ELOQUENCE OF M. DE VILMORIN

As they walked down the hill together, it was now M. de Vilmorin who was silent and preoccupied, André-Louis who was talkative. He had chosen Woman as a subject for his present discourse. He claimed—quite unjustifiably—to have discovered Woman that morning; and the things he had to say of the sex were unflattering, and occasionally almost gross. M. de Vilmorin, having ascertained the subject, did not listen. Singular though it may seem in a young French abbé of his day, M. de Vilmorin was not interested in Woman. Poor Philippe was in several ways exceptional.

Opposite the Bréton Armé—the inn and posting house at the entrance of the village of Gavrillac—M. de Vilmorin interrupted his companion just as he was soaring to the dizziest heights of caustic invective, and André-Louis restored thereby to actualities, observed the carriage of M. de La Tour d'Azyr standing before the door of the hostelry.

"I don't believe you've been listening to me," said he.

"Had you been less interested in what you were saying, you might have observed it sooner and spared your breath. The fact is, you disappoint me, André. You seem to have forgotten what we went for. I have an appointment here with M. le Marquis. He desires to hear me further in the matter. Up there at Gavrillac I could accomplish nothing. The time was ill-chosen, as it happened. But I have hopes of M. le Marquis."

"Hopes of what?"

"That he will make what reparation lies in his power. Provide for the widow and the orphans. Why else should he desire to hear me further?"

"Unusual condescension," said André-Louis, and quoted: "*Timeo Danaos et dona ferentes.*"

"Why?" asked Philippe.

"Let us go and discover—unless you consider that I shall be in the way."

Into a room on the right, rendered private to M. le Marquis for so long as he should elect to honour it, the young men were ushered by the host. A fire of logs was burning brightly at the room's far end, and by this sat now M. de La Tour d'Azyr and his cousin, the Chevalier de Chabrilanne. Both rose

as M. de Vilmorin came in. André-Louis following paused to close the door.

"You oblige me by your prompt courtesy, M. de Vilmorin," said the Marquis, but in a tone so cold as to belie the politeness of his words. "A chair, I beg. Ah, Moreau?" The note was frigidly interrogative. "He accompanies you, monsieur?" he asked.

"If you please, M. le Marquis."

"Why not? Find yourself a seat, Moreau." He spoke over his shoulder as to a lackey.

"It is good of you, monsieur," said Philippe, "to have offered me this opportunity of continuing the subject that took me so fruitlessly, as it happens, to Gavrillac."

The Marquis crossed his legs, and held one of his fine hands to the blaze. He replied, without troubling to turn to the young man, who was slightly behind him.

"The goodness of my request we will leave out of question for the moment," said he, darkly, and M. de Chabrilanne laughed. André-Louis thought him easily moved to mirth, and almost envied him the faculty.

"But I am grateful," Philippe insisted, "that you should condescend to hear me plead their cause."

The Marquis stared at him over his shoulder. "Whose cause?" quoth he.

"Why, the cause of the widow and orphans of this unfortunate Mabey."

The Marquis looked from Vilmorin to the Chevalier, and again the Chevalier laughed, slapping his leg this time.

"I think," said M. de La Tour d'Azyr, slowly, "that we are at cross purposes. I asked you to come here because the Château de Gavrillac was hardly a suitable place in which to carry our discussion further, and because I hesitated to incommode you by suggesting that you should come all the way to Azyr. But my object is connected with certain expressions that you let fall up there. It is on the subject of those expressions, monsieur, that I would hear you further—if you will honour me."

André-Louis began to apprehend that there was something sinister in the air. He was a man of quick intuitions, quicker far than those of M. de Vilmorin, who evinced no more than a mild surprise.

"I am at a loss, monsieur," said he. "To what expressions does monsieur allude?"

"It seems, monsieur, that I must refresh your memory." The Marquis uncrossed his legs and swung sideways on his

chair, so that at last he directly faced M. de Vilmorin. "You spoke, monsieur—and however mistaken you may have been, you spoke very eloquently, too eloquently almost, it seemed to me—of the infamy of such a deed as the act of summary justice upon this thieving fellow Mabey, or whatever his name may be. *Infamy* was the precise word you used. You did not retract that word when I had the honour to inform you that it was by my orders that my gamekeeper Benet proceeded as he did."

"If," said M. de Vilmorin, "the deed was infamous, its infamy is not modified by the rank, however exalted, of the person responsible. Rather is it aggravated."

"Ah!" said M. le Marquis, and drew a gold snuff-box from his pocket. "You say, 'if the deed was infamous,' monsieur. Am I to understand that you are no longer as convinced as you appeared to be of its infamy?"

M. de Vilmorin's fine face wore a look of perplexity. He did not understand the drift of this.

"It occurs to me, M. le Marquis, in view of your readiness to assume responsibility, that you must believe in some justification for the deed which is not apparent to myself."

"That is better. That is distinctly better." The Marquis took snuff delicately, dusting the fragments from the fine lace at his throat. "You realise that with an imperfect understanding of these matters, not being yourself a landowner, you may have rushed to unjustifiable conclusions. That is indeed the case. May it be a warning to you, monsieur. When I tell you that for months past I have been annoyed by similar depredations, you will perhaps understand that it had become necessary to employ a deterrent sufficiently strong to put an end to them. Now that the risk is known, I do not think there will be any more prowling in my coverts. And there is more in it than that, M. de Vilmorin. It is not the poaching that annoys me so much as the contempt for my absolute and inviolable rights. There is, monsieur, as you cannot fail to have observed, an evil spirit of insubordination in the air, and there is only one way in which to meet it. To tolerate it in however slight a degree, to show leniency, however leniently disposed, would entail having recourse to still harsher measures to-morrow. You understand me, I am sure, and you will also, I am sure, appreciate the condescension of what amounts to an explanation from me where I cannot admit that any explanations were due. If anything in what I have said is still obscure to you I refer you to the game laws, which your lawyer friend there will expound for you at need."

With that the gentleman swung round again to face the

fire. It appeared to convey the intimation that the interview was at an end. And yet this was not by any means the intimation that it conveyed to the watchful, puzzled, vaguely uneasy André-Louis. It was, thought he, a very curious, a very suspicious oration. It affected to explain with a politeness of terms and a calculated insolence of tone; whilst in fact it could only serve to stimulate and goad a man of M. de Vilmorin's opinions. And that is precisely what it did. He rose.

"Are there in the world no laws but game laws?" he demanded heatedly. "Have you never by any chance heard of the laws of humanity?"

The Marquis sighed wearily. "What have I to do with the laws of humanity?" he wondered.

M. de Vilmorin looked at him a moment in speechless amazement.

"Nothing, Monsieur le Marquis. That is—alas—too obvious. I hope you will remember it in the hour when you may wish to appeal to those laws which you now deride."

M. de La Tour d'Azyr threw back his head sharply, his high-bred face imperious.

"Now what precisely shall that mean? It is not the first time to-day that you have made use of dark sayings that I could almost believe to veil the presumption of a threat."

"Not a threat, Monsieur le Marquis—a warning. A warning that such deeds as these against God's creatures . . . Oh, you may sneer, monsieur, but they are God's creatures, even as you or I—neither more nor less, deeply though the reflection may wound your pride. In His eyes . . ."

"Of your charity, spare me a sermon, Monsieur l'Abbé!"

"You mock, monsieur. You laugh. Will you laugh, I wonder, when God presents His reckoning to you for the blood and plunder with which your hands are full?"

"Monsieur!" The word, sharp as the crack of a whip, was from M. de Chabrilanne, who bounded to his feet. But instantly the Marquis repressed him.

"Sit down, Chevalier. You are interrupting Monsieur l'Abbé, and I should like to hear him further. He interests me profoundly."

In the background, André-Louis, too, had risen, brought to his feet by alarm, by the evil that he saw written on the handsome face of M. de La Tour d'Azyr. He approached, and touched his friend upon the arm.

"Better be going, Philippe," said he.

But M. de Vilmorin, caught in the relentless grip of passions long repressed, was being hurried by them recklessly along.

"Oh, monsieur," said he, "consider what you are and what you will be. Consider how you and your kind live by abuses, and consider the harvest that abuses must ultimately bring."

"Revolutionist!" said Monsieur le Marquis contemptuously. "You have the effrontery to stand before my face and offer me this stinking cant of your modern so-called intellectuals!"

"Is it cant, monsieur? Do you think—do you believe in your soul—that it is cant? Is it cant that the feudal grip is on all things that live, crushing them like grapes in the press, to its own profit? Does it not exercise its rights upon the waters of the river, the fire that bakes the poor man's bread of grass and barley, on the wind that turns the mill? The peasant cannot take a step upon the road, cross a crazy bridge over a river, buy an ell of cloth in the village market, without meeting feudal rapacity, without being taxed in feudal dues. Is not that enough, Monsieur le Marquis? Must you also demand his wretched life in payment for the least infringement of your sacred privileges, careless of what widows or orphans you dedicate to woe? Will naught content you but that your shadow must lie like a curse upon the land? And do you think in your pride that France, this Job among the nations, will suffer it forever?"

He paused as if for a reply. But none came. The Marquis considered him, strangely silent, a half-smile of disdain at the corner of his lips, an ominous hardness in his eyes.

Again André-Louis tugged at his friend's sleeve.

"Philippe."

Philippe shook him off, and plunged on, fanatically.

"Do you see nothing of the gathering clouds that herald the coming of the storm? You imagine perhaps that these States General summoned by M. Necker, and promised for next year, are to do nothing but devise fresh means of extortion to liquidate the bankruptcy of the State? You delude yourselves, as you shall find. The Third Estate, which you despise, will prove itself the preponderating force, and it will find a way to make an end of this canker of Privilege that is devouring the vitals of this unfortunate country."

Monsieur le Marquis shifted in his chair, and spoke at last.

"You have, monsieur," said he, "a very dangerous gift of eloquence. And it is of yourself rather than of your subject. For after all, what do you offer me? A réchauffé of the dishes served to out-at-elbow enthusiasts in the provincial literary chambers, compounded of the effusions of your Voltaires and Jean-Jacques, and such dirty-fingered scribblers. You have not among all your philosophers one with the wit to understand

that we are an order consecrated by antiquity, that for our rights and privileges we have behind us the authority of centuries."

"Humanity, monsieur," Philippe replied, "is more ancient than nobility. Human rights are contemporary with man."

The Marquis laughed and shrugged.

"That is the answer I might have expected. It has the right note of cant that distinguishes the philosophers."

And then M. de Chabrilanne spoke.

"You go a long way round," he criticised his cousin, on a note of impatience.

"But I am getting there," he was answered. "I desired to make quite certain first."

"Faith, you should have no doubt by now."

"I have none." The Marquis rose and turned again to M. de Vilmorin, who had understood nothing of that brief exchange. "M. l'Abbé," said he once more, "you have a very dangerous gift of eloquence. I can conceive of men being swayed by it. Had you been born a gentleman, you would not so easily have acquired these false views that you express."

Monsieur de Vilmorin stared blankly, uncomprehending.

"Had I been born a gentleman, do you say?" quoth he, in a slow, bewildered voice. "But I was born a gentleman. My race is as old, my blood as good as yours, monsieur."

From Monsieur le Marquis there was a slight play of eyebrows, a vague, indulgent smile. His dark, liquid eyes looked squarely into the face of M. de Vilmorin.

"You have been deceived in that, I fear."

"Deceived?"

"Your sentiments betray the indiscretion of which madam your mother must have been guilty."

The brutally affronting words were sped beyond recall, and the lips that had uttered them, coldly, as if they had been the merest commonplace, remained calm and faintly sneering.

A dead silence followed. André-Louis's wits were numbed. He stood aghast, all thought suspended in him, what time M. de Vilmorin's eyes continued fixed upon M. de La Tour d'Azyr's, as if searching there for a meaning that eluded him. Quite suddenly he understood the vile affront. The blood leapt to his face, fire blazed in his gentle eyes. A convulsive shiver shook him. Then, with an inarticulate cry, he leaned forward, and with his open hand struck M. le Marquis full and hard upon his sneering face.

In a flash M. de Chabrilanne was on his feet, between the two men.

Too late André-Louis had seen the trap. La Tour d'Azyr's words were but as a move in a game of chess, calculated to exasperate his opponent into some such counter-move as this—a counter-move that left him entirely at the other's mercy.

M. le Marquis looked on, very white save where M. de Vil-morin's finger-prints began slowly to colour his face; but he said nothing more. Instead, it was M. de Chabrilanne who now did the talking, taking up his preconcerted part in this vile game.

"You realise, monsieur, what you have done?" said he, coldly, to Philippe. "And you realise, of course, what must inevitably follow?"

Monsieur de Vilmorin had realised nothing. The poor young man had acted upon impulse, upon the instinct of decency and honour, never counting the consequences. But he realised them now at the sinister invitation of M. de Chabrilanne, and if he desired to avoid these consequences, it was out of respect for his priestly vocation which strictly forbade such adjustments of disputes as M. de Chabrilanne was clearly thrusting upon him.

He drew back. "Let one affront wipe out the other," said he, in a dull voice. "The balance is still in M. le Marquis's favour. Let that content him."

"Impossible." The Chevalier's lips came together tightly. Thereafter he was suavity itself, but very firm. "A blow has been struck, monsieur. I think I am correct in saying that such a thing has never happened before to Monsieur le Marquis in all his life. If you felt yourself affronted, you had but to ask the satisfaction due from one gentleman to another. Your action would seem to confirm the assumption that you found so offensive. But it does not on that account render you immune from the consequences."

It was, you see, M. de Chabrilanne's part to heap coals upon this fire, to make quite sure that their victim should not escape them.

"I desire no immunity," flashed back the young seminarist, stung by this fresh goad. After all, he was nobly born, and the traditions of his class were strong upon him—stronger far than the seminarist schooling in humanity. He owed it to himself, to his honour, to be killed rather than avoid the consequences of the thing he had done.

"But he does not wear a sword, messieurs!" cried André-Louis, aghast.

"That is easily amended. He may have the loan of mine."

"I mean, messieurs," André-Louis insisted between fear for his friend and indignation, "that it is not his habit to wear

a sword, that he has never worn one, that he is untutored in its uses. He is a seminarist—a postulant for holy orders, already half a priest, and so forbidden from such an engagement as you propose.”

“All that he should have remembered before he struck the blow,” said M. de Chabrilanne politely.

“The blow was deliberately provoked,” raged André-Louis. Then he recovered himself, though the other’s haughty stare had no part in that recovery. “Oh, my God, I talk in vain! How is one to argue against a purpose formed? Come away, Philippe. Don’t you see the trap? . . .”

M. de Vilmorin cut him short, and flung him off. “Be quiet, André. Monsieur le Marquis is entirely in the right.”

“Monsieur le Marquis is in the right?” André-Louis let his arms fall helplessly. This man he loved above all other living men was caught in the snare of the world’s insanity. He was baring his breast to the knife for the sake of a vague, distorted sense of the honour due to himself. It was not that he did not see the trap. It was that his honour compelled him to disdain consideration of it. To André-Louis in that moment he seemed a singularly tragic figure. Noble, perhaps, but very pitiful.

CHAPTER IV

THE HERITAGE

It was M. de Vilmorin’s desire that the matter should be settled out of hand. In this he was at once objective and subjective. A prey to emotions sadly at conflict with his priestly vocation, he was above all in haste to have done, so that he might resume a frame of mind more proper to it. Also he feared himself a little; by which I mean that his honour feared his nature. The circumstances of his education, and the goal that for some years now he had kept in view, had robbed him of much of that spirited brutality that is the birthright of the male. He had grown timid and gentle as a woman. Aware of it, he feared that once the heat of his passion were spent he might betray a dishonouring weakness in the ordeal.

Monsieur le Marquis, on his side, was no less eager for an immediate settlement; and since they had M. de Chabrilanne to act for his cousin, and André-Louis to serve as witness for M. de Vilmorin, there was nothing to delay him.

And so, within a few minutes, all arrangements were concluded, and you behold that sinisterly-intentioned little group

of four assembled in the afternoon sunshine on the bowling-green behind the inn. They were entirely private, screened more or less from the windows of the house by a ramage of trees which, if leafless now was at least dense enough to provide an effective lattice.

There were no formalities over measurements of blades or selection of ground. Monsieur le Marquis removed his sword-belt and scabbard, but declined—not considering it worth while for the sake of so negligible an opponent—to divest himself either of his shoes or his coat. Tall, lithe, and athletic, he stood to face the no less tall, but very delicate and frail, M. de Vilmorin. The latter also disdained to make any of the usual preparations. Since he recognised that it could avail him nothing to strip, he came on guard fully dressed, two hectic spots above the cheek-bones burning on his otherwise grey face.

M. de Chabrilanne, leaning upon a cane—for he had relinquished his sword to M. de Vilmorin—looked on with quiet interest. Facing him on the other side of the combatants stood André-Louis, the palest of the four, staring from fevered eyes, twisting and untwisting clammy hands.

His every instinct was to fling himself between the antagonists, to protest against and frustrate this meeting. That sane impulse was curbed, however, by the consciousness of its futility. To calm him, he clung to the conviction that the issue could not really be very serious. If the obligations of Philippe's honour compelled him to cross swords with the man he had struck, M. de La Tour d'Azyr's birth compelled him no less to do no serious hurt to the unfledged lad he had so grievously provoked. M. le Marquis, after all, was a man of honour. He could intend no more than to administer a lesson : sharp, perhaps, but one by which his opponent must live to profit. André-Louis clung obstinately to this for comfort.

Steel beat on steel, and the men engaged. The Marquis presented to his opponent the narrow edge of his upright body, his knees slightly flexed and converted into living springs, whilst M. de Vilmorin stood squarely, a full target, his knees wooden. Honour and the spirit of fair play alike cried out against such a match.

The encounter was very short, of course. In youth, Philippe had received the tutoring in sword-play that was given to every boy born into his station of life. And so he knew at least the rudiments of what was now expected of him. But what could rudiments avail him here ? Three disengages completed the exchanges, and then without any haste the Marquis slid his right foot along the moist turf, his long graceful body extending

itself in a lunge that went under M. de Vilmorin's clumsy guard, and with the utmost deliberation he drove his blade through the young man's vitals.

André-Louis sprang forward just in time to catch his friend's body under the armpits as it sank. Then, his own legs bending beneath the weight of it, he went down with his burden until he was kneeling on the damp turf. Philippe's limp head lay against André-Louis's left shoulder; Philippe's relaxed arms trailed at his sides; the blood welled and bubbled from the ghastly wound to saturate the poor lad's garments.

With white face and twitching lips, André-Louis looked up at M. de La Tour d'Azyr, who stood surveying his work with a countenance of grave but remorseless interest.

"You have killed him!" cried André-Louis.

"Of course."

The Marquis ran a lace handkerchief along his blade to wipe it. As he let the dainty fabric fall, he explained himself. "He had, as I told him, a too dangerous gift of eloquence."

And he turned away, leaving completest understanding with André-Louis. Still supporting the limp, draining body, the young man called to him:

"Come back, you cowardly murderer, and make yourself quite safe by killing me too."

The Marquis half-turned his face, dark with anger. Then M. de Chabrilanne set a restraining hand upon his arm. Although a party throughout to the deed, the Chevalier was a little appalled now that it was done. He had not the high stomach of M. de La Tour d'Azyr, and he was a good deal younger.

"Come away," he said. "The lad is raving. They were friends."

"You heard what he said?" quoth the Marquis.

"Nor can he, or you, or any man deny it," flung back André-Louis. "Yourself, monsieur, you made confession when you gave me now the reason why you killed him. You did it because you feared him."

"If that were true—what then?" asked the great gentleman.

"Do you ask? Do you understand of life and humanity nothing but how to wear a coat and dress your hair—oh, yes, and to handle weapons against boys and priests? Have you no mind to think, no soul into which you can turn its vision? Must you be told that it is a coward's part to kill the thing he fears, and doubly a coward's part to kill in this way? Had you stabbed him in the back with a knife, you would have shown the courage of your vileness. It would have been a vileness undisguised. But you feared the consequences of

that, powerful as you are ; and so you shelter your cowardice under the pretext of a duel."

The Marquis shook off his cousin's hand, and took a step forward, holding now his sword like a whip. But again the Chevalier caught and held him.

"No, no, Gervais ! Let be, in God's name !"

"Let him come, monsieur," raved André-Louis, his voice thick and concentrated. "Let him complete his coward's work on me, and thus make himself safe from a coward's wages."

M. de Chabrillanne let his cousin go. He came, white to the lips, his eyes glaring at the lad who so recklessly insulted him. And then he checked. It may be that he remembered suddenly the relationship in which this young man was popularly believed to stand to the Seigneur de Gavrilac, and the well-known affection in which the Seigneur held him. And so he may have realised that if he pushed this matter further, he might find himself upon the horns of a dilemma. He would be confronted with the alternatives of shedding more blood, and so embroiling himself with the Lord of Gavrilac at a time when that gentleman's friendship was of the first importance to him, or else of withdrawing with such hurt to his dignity as must impair his authority in the countryside hereafter.

Be it so or otherwise, the fact remains that he stopped short ; then, with an incoherent ejaculation, between anger and contempt, he tossed his arms, turned on his heel, and strode off quickly with his cousin.

When the landlord and his people came, they found André-Louis, his arms about the body of his dead friend, murmuring passionately into the deaf ear that rested almost against his lips :

"Philippe ! Speak to me, Philippe ! Philippe . . . don't you hear me ? Oh, God of Heaven ! Philippe !"

At a glance they saw that here neither priest nor doctor could avail. The cheek that lay against André-Louis's was leaden-hued, the half-open eyes were glazed, and there was a little froth of blood upon the vacuously parted lips.

Half-blinded by tears, André-Louis stumbled after them when they bore the body into the inn. Upstairs in the little room to which they conveyed it he knelt by the bed and holding the dead man's hand in both his own, he swore to him out of his impotent rage that M. de La Tour d'Azyr should pay a bitter price for this.

"It was your eloquence he feared, Philippe," he said. "Then if I can get no justice for this deed, at least it shall be fruitless to him. The thing he feared in you, he shall fear in me. He

feared that men might be swayed by your eloquence to the undoing of such things as himself. Men shall be swayed by it still. ^For your eloquence and your arguments shall be my heritage from you. I will make them my own. It matters nothing that I did not believe in your gospel of freedom. I know it—every word of it ; that is all that matters to our purpose, yours and mine. If all else fails, your thoughts shall find expression in my living tongue. Thus at least we shall have frustrated his vile aim to still the voice he feared. It shall profit him nothing to have your blood upon his soul. That voice in you would never half so relentlessly have hounded him and his as it shall in me—if all else fails.”

It was an exulting thought. It calmed him ; it soothed his grief, and he began very softly to pray. And then his heart trembled as he considered that Philippe, a man of peace, almost a priest, an apostle of Christianity, had gone to his Maker with the sin of anger on his soul. It was horrible. Yet God would see the righteousness of that anger. And in no case—be man’s interpretation of Divinity what it might—could that one sin outweigh the loving good that Philippe had ever practised, the noble purity of his great heart. God, after all, reflected André-Louis, was not a grand-seigneur.

CHAPTER V

THE LORD OF GAVRILLAC

FOR the second time that day André-Louis set out for the château, walking briskly, and heeding not at all the curious eyes that followed him through the village, and the whisperings that marked his passage through the people, all agog by now with that day’s event in which he had been an actor.

He was ushered by Benoît, the elderly body-servant, rather grandiloquently called the seneschal, into the ground-floor room known traditionally as the library. It still contained several shelves of neglected volumes, from which it derived its title, but implements of the chase—fowling-pieces, powder-horns, hunting-bags, sheath-knives—obtruded far more prominently than those of study. The furniture was massive, of oak richly carved, and belonging to another age. Great massive oak beams crossed the rather lofty whitewashed ceiling.

Here the squat Seigneur de Gavrilac was restlessly pacing when André-Louis was introduced. He was already informed,

as he announced at once, of what had taken place at the Bréton Armé. M. de Chabrilanne had just left him, and he confessed himself deeply grieved and deeply perplexed.

"The pity of it!" he said. "The pity of it!" He bowed his enormous head. "So estimable a young man, and so full of promise. Ah, this La Tour d'Azyr is a hard man, and he feels very strongly in these matters. He may be right. I don't know. I have never killed a man for holding different views from mine. In fact, I have never killed a man at all. It isn't in my nature. I shouldn't sleep of nights if I did. But men are different made."

"The question, monsieur my godfather," said André-Louis, "is what is to be done!" He was quite calm and self-possessed, but very white.

M. de Kercadiou stared at him blankly out of his pale eyes.

"Why, what the devil is there to do? From what I am told, Vilmorin went so far as to strike M. le Marquis."

"Under the very grossest provocation."

"Which he himself provoked by his revolutionary language. The poor lad's head was full of this encyclopædist trash. It comes of too much reading. I have never set much store by books, André; and I have never known anything but trouble to come out of learning. It unsettles a man. It complicates his views of life, destroys the simplicity which makes for peace of mind and happiness. Let this miserable affair be a warning to you, André. You are, yourself, too prone to these new-fashioned speculations upon a different constitution of the social order. You see what comes of it. A fine, estimable young man, the only prop of his widowed mother too, forgets himself, his position, his duty to that mother—everything; and goes and gets himself killed like this. It is infernally sad. On my soul it is sad." He produced a handkerchief and blew his nose with vehemence.

André-Louis felt a tightening of his heart, a lessening of the hopes, never too sanguine, which he had founded upon his godfather.

"Your criticisms," he said, "are all for the conduct of the dead, and none for that of the assassin. It does not seem possible that you should be in sympathy with such a crime."

"Crime?" shrilled M. de Kercadiou. "My God, boy, you are speaking of M. de La Tour d'Azyr!"

"I am, and of the abominable murder he has committed. . . ."

"Stop!" M. de Kercadiou was very emphatic. "I cannot permit that you apply such terms to him. I cannot

permit it. M. le Marquis is my friend, and is likely very soon to stand in a still closer relationship."

"Notwithstanding this?" asked André-Louis.

M. de Kercadiou was frankly impatient.

"Why, what has this to do with it? I may deplore it. But I have no right to condemn it. It is a common way of adjusting differences between gentlemen."

"You really believe that?"

"What the devil do you imply, André? Should I say a thing that I don't believe? You begin to make me angry."

"'Thou shalt not kill,' is the King's law as well as God's."

"You are determined to quarrel with me, I think. It was a duel . . ."

André-Louis interrupted him. "It was no more a duel than if it had been fought with pistols of which only M. le Marquis's was loaded. He invited Philippe to discuss the matter further, with the deliberate intent of forcing a quarrel upon him and killing him. Be patient with me, monsieur my godfather. I am not telling you of what I imagine, but what M. le Marquis himself admitted to me."

Dominated a little by the young man's earnestness, M. de Kercadiou's pale eyes fell away. He turned with a shrug and sauntered over to the window.

"It would need a court of honour to decide such an issue. And we have no courts of honour," he said.

"But we have courts of justice."

With returning testiness the Seigneur swung round to face him again. "And what court of justice, do you think, would listen to such a plea as you appear to have in mind?"

"There is the court of the King's Lieutenant at Rennes."

"And do you think the King's Lieutenant would listen to you?"

"Not to me, perhaps, monsieur. But if you were to bring the plaint . . ."

"I bring the plaint?" M. de Kercadiou's pale eyes were wide with the horror of the suggestion.

"The thing happened here on your domain."

"I bring a plaint against M. de La Tour d'Azyr? You are out of your senses, I think. Oh, you are mad; as mad as that poor friend of yours who has come to this end through meddling in what did not concern him. The language he used here to M. le Marquis on the score of Mabey was of the most offensive. Perhaps you didn't know that. It does not at all surprise me that the Marquis should have desired satisfaction."

"I see," said André-Louis, on a note of hopelessness.

"You see! What the devil do you see?"

"That I shall have to depend upon myself alone."

"And what the devil do you propose to do, if you please?"

"I shall go to Rennes, and lay the facts before the King's Lieutenant."

"He'll be too busy to see you." And M. de Kercadiou's mind swung a trifle inconsequently, as weak minds will. "There is trouble enough in Rennes already on the score of those crazy States General, with which the wonderful M. Necker is to repair the finances of the kingdom. As if a peddling Swiss bank-clerk, who is also a damned Protestant, could succeed where such men as Calonne and Brienne have failed."

"Good afternoon, monsieur my godfather," said André-Louis.

"Where are you going?" was the querulous demand.

"Home at present. To Rennes in the morning."

"Wait, boy, wait!" The squat little man rolled forward, affectionate concern on his great ugly face, and he set one of his podgy hands on his godson's shoulder. "Now listen to me, André," he reasoned. "This is sheer knight-errantry—moonshine, lunacy. You'll come to no good by it if you persist. You've read Don Quixote, and what happened to him when he went tilting against windmills. It's what will happen to you, neither more nor less. Leave things as they are, my boy. I wouldn't have a mischief happen to you."

André-Louis looked at him, smiling wanly.

"I swore an oath to-day which it would damn my soul to break."

"You mean that you'll go in spite of anything that I may say?" Impetuous as he was inconsequent, M. de Kercadiou was bristling again. "Very well, then, go . . . Go to the devil!"

"I will begin with the King's Lieutenant."

"And if you get into the trouble you are seeking, don't come whimpering to me for assistance," the Seigneur stormed. He was very angry now. "Since you choose to disobey me, you can break your empty head against the windmill, and be damned to you!"

André-Louis bowed with a touch of irony, and reached the door.

"If the windmill should prove too formidable," said he, from the threshold, "I may see what can be done with the wind. Good-bye, monsieur my godfather."

He was gone, and M. de Kercadiou was alone, purple in the face, puzzling out that last cryptic utterance, and not at all happy in his mind, either on the score of his godson or of

M. de La Tour d'Azyr. He was disposed to be angry with them both. He found these headstrong, wilful men who relentlessly followed their own impulses very disturbing and irritating. Himself, he loved his ease, and to be at peace with his neighbours; and that seemed to him so obviously the supreme good of life that he was disposed to brand them as fools who troubled to seek other things.

CHAPTER VI

THE WINDMILL

THERE was between Nantes and Rennes an established service of three stage-coaches weekly in each direction, which for a sum of twenty-four livres—roughly, the equivalent of an English guinea—would carry you the seventy and odd miles of the journey in some fourteen hours. Once a week one of the diligences going in each direction would swerve aside from the highroad to call at Gavrillac, to bring and take letters, newspapers, and sometimes passengers. It was usually by this coach that André-Louis came and went when the occasion offered. At present, however, he was too much in haste to lose a day awaiting the passing of that diligence. So it was on a horse hired from the Bréton Armé that he set out next morning; and an hour's brisk ride under a grey wintry sky, by a half-ruined road through ten miles of flat, uninteresting country, brought him to the City of Rennes.

He rode across the main bridge over the Vilaine, and so into the upper and principle part of that important city of some thirty thousand souls, most of whom, he opined from the seething, clamant crowds that everywhere blocked his way, must on this day have taken to the streets. Clearly Philippe had not overstated the excitement prevailing here.

He pushed on as best he could, and so came at last to the Place Royale, where he found the crowd to be most dense. From the plinth of the equestrian statue of Louis XV a white-faced young man was excitedly addressing the multitude. His youth and dress proclaimed the student, and a group of his fellows, acting as a guard of honour to him, kept the immediate precincts of the statue.

Over the heads of the crowd André-Louis caught a few of the phrases flung forth by that eager voice.

"It was the promise of the King. . . . It is the King's authority they flout . . . they arrogate to themselves the

whole sovereignty in Brittany. The King has dissolved them. . . . These insolent nobles defying their sovereign and the people. . . ."

Had he not known already, from what Philippe had told him, of the events which had brought the Third Estate to the point of active revolt, those few phrases would fully have informed him. This popular display of temper was most opportune to his need, he thought. And in the hope that it might serve his turn by disposing to reasonableness the mind of the King's Lieutenant, he pushed on up the wide and well-paved Rue Royale, where the concourse of people began to diminish. He put up his hired horse at the Corne de Cerf and set out again, on foot, to the Palais de Justice.

There was a brawling mob by the framework of poles and scaffoldings about the building Cathedral, upon which work had been commenced a year ago. But he did not pause to ascertain the particular cause of that gathering. He strode on, and thus came presently to the handsome Italianate palace that was one of the few public edifices that had survived the devastating fire of sixty years ago.

He won through with difficulty to the great hall, known as the Salle des Pas Perdus, where he was left to cool his heels for a full half-hour after he had found an usher so condescending as to inform the god who presided over that shrine of justice that a lawyer from Gavrillac humbly begged an audience on an affair of gravity.

That the god condescended to see him at all was probably due to the grave complexion of the hour. At long length he was escorted up the broad stone staircase, and ushered into a spacious meagrely-furnished anteroom, to make one of a waiting crowd of clients, mostly men.

There he spent another half-hour, and employed the time in considering exactly what he should say. This consideration made him realise the weakness of the case he proposed to set before a man whose views of law and morality were coloured by his social rank.

At last he was ushered through a narrow but very massive and richly decorated door into a fine, well-lighted room, furnished with enough gilt and satin to have supplied the boudoir of a lady of fashion.

It was a trivial setting for a King's Lieutenant, but about the King's Lieutenant there was—at least to ordinary eyes—nothing trivial. At the far end of the chamber, to the right of one of the tall windows that looked out over the inner court, before a goat-legged writing-table with Watteau panels

heavily encrusted with ormolu, sat that exalted being. Above a scarlet coat with an order flaming on its breast, and a billow of lace in which diamonds sparkled like drops of water sprouted the massive powdered head of M. de Lesdiguières. It was thrown back to scowl upon this visitor with an expectant arrogance that made André-Louis wonder almost was a genuflection awaited from him.

Perceiving a lean, lantern-jawed young man, with straight, lank, black hair, in a caped riding-coat of brown cloth, and yellow buckskin breeches, his knee boots splashed with mud, the scowl upon that august visage deepened until it brought together the thick black eyebrows above the great hooked nose.

"You announce yourself as a lawyer of Gavrillac with an important communication," he growled. It was a peremptory command to make this communication without wasting the valuable time of the King's Lieutenant, of whose immense importance it conveyed something more than a hint. Monsieur de Lesdiguières accounted himself an imposing personality, and he had every reason to do so, for in his time he had seen many a poor devil scared out of all his senses by the thunder of his voice.

He waited now to see the same thing happen to his youthful lawyer from Gavrillac. But he waited in vain.

André-Louis found him ridiculous. He knew pretentiousness for the mask of worthlessness and weakness. And here he beheld pretentiousness incarnate. It was to be read in that arrogant poise of the head, that scowling brow, the inflexion of that reverberating voice. Even more difficult than it is for a man to be a hero to his valet—who has witnessed the disposal of the parts that make up the imposing whole—is it for a man to be a hero to the student of Man, who has witnessed the same in a different sense.

André-Louis stood forward boldly—impudently, thought M. de Lesdiguières.

"You are His Majesty's Lieutenant here in Brittany," he said—and it almost seemed to the august lord of life and death that this fellow had the incredible effrontery to address him as one man speaking to another. "You are the dispenser of the King's high justice in this province."

Surprise spread on that handsome, sallow face under the heavily-powdered wig.

"Is your business concerned with this infernal insubordination of the canaille?" he asked.

"It is not, monsieur."

The black eyebrows rose. "Then what the devil do you

mean by intruding upon me at a time when all my attention is being claimed by the obvious urgency of this disgraceful affair ? ”

“ The affair that brings me is no less disgraceful and no less urgent. ”

“ It will have to wait ! ” thundered the great man in a passion, and tossing back a cloud of lace from his hand, he reached for the little silver bell upon his table.

“ A moment, monsieur ! ” André-Louis’s tone was peremptory. M. de Lesdiguières checked in sheer amazement at its impudence. “ I can state it very briefly . . . ”

“ Haven’t I said already . . . ”

“ And when you have heard it, ” André-Louis went on relentlessly, interrupting the interruption, “ you will agree with me as to its character. ”

M. de Lesdiguières considered him very sternly.

“ What is your name ? ” he asked.

“ André-Louis Moreau. ”

“ Well, André-Louis Moreau, if you can state your plea briefly, I will hear you. But I warn you that I shall be very angry if you fail to justify the impertinence of this insistence at so inopportune a moment. ”

“ You shall be the judge of that, monsieur, ” said André-Louis, and he proceeded at once to state his case, beginning with the shooting of Mabey, and passing thence to the killing of M. de Vilmorin. But he withheld until the end the name of the great gentleman against whom he demanded justice, persuaded that did he introduce it earlier he would not be allowed to proceed.

He had a gift of oratory of whose full powers he was himself hardly conscious yet, though destined very soon to become so. He told his story well, without exaggeration, yet with a force of simple appeal that was irresistible. Gradually the great man’s face relaxed from its forbidding severity. Interest, warming almost to sympathy, came to be reflected on it.

“ And who, sir, is the man you charge with this ? ”

“ The Marquis de La Tour d’Azyr. ”

The effect of that formidable name was immediate. Dismayed anger, and an arrogance more utter than before, took the place of the sympathy he had been betrayed into displaying.

“ Who ? ” he shouted, and without waiting for an answer. “ Why, here’s impudence, ” he stormed on, “ to come before me with such a charge against a gentleman of M. de La Tour d’Azyr’s eminence ! How dare you speak of him as a coward . . . ”

"I speak of him as a murderer," the young man corrected. "And I demand justice against him."

"You demand it, do you? My God, what next?"

"That is for you to say, monsieur."

It surprised the great gentleman into a more or less successful effort at self-control.

"Let me warn you," said he acidly, "that it is not wise to make wild accusations against a nobleman. That in itself, is a punishable offence, as you may learn. Now listen to me. In this matter of Mabey—assuming your statement of it to be exact—the gamekeeper may have exceeded his duty; but by so little that it is hardly worth comment. Consider, however, that in any case it is not a matter for the King's Lieutenant, or for any court but the seigneurial court of M. de La Tour d'Azyr himself. It is before the magistrates of his own appointing that such a matter must be laid, since it is a matter strictly concerning his own seigneurial jurisdiction. As a lawyer you should not need to be told so much."

"As a lawyer I am prepared to argue the point. But as a lawyer I also realise that if that case were prosecuted, it could only end in the unjust punishment of a wretched gamekeeper, who did no more than carry out his orders, but who none the less would now be made a scapegoat, if scapegoat were necessary. I am not concerned to hang Benet on the gallows earned by M. de La Tour d'Azyr."

M. de Lesdiguières smote the table violently. "My God!" he cried out, to add more quietly, on a note of menace, "You are singularly insolent, my man."

"That is not my intention, sir, I assure you. I am a lawyer, pleading a case—the case of M. de Vilmorin. It is for his assassination that I have come to beg the King's justice."

"But you yourself have said that it was a duel!" cried the Lieutenant, between anger and bewilderment.

"I have said that it was made to appear a duel. There is a distinction, as I shall show, if you will condescend to hear me out."

"Take your own time, sir!" said the ironical M. de Lesdiguières, whose tenure of office had never yet held anything that remotely resembled this experience.

André-Louis took him literally. "I thank you, sir," he answered solemnly, and submitted his argument. "It can be shown that M. de Vilmorin never practised fencing in all his life, and it is notorious that M. de La Tour d'Azyr is an exceptional swordsman. Is it a duel, monsieur, where one of the combatants alone is armed? For it amounts to that on a comparison of their measures of respective skill."

"There has scarcely been a duel fought on which the same trumpety argument might not be advanced."

"But not always with equal justice. And in one case, at least, it was advanced successfully."

"Successfully? When was that?"

"Ten years ago, in Dauphiny. I refer to the case of M. de Gesvres, a gentleman of that province, who forced a duel upon M. de la Roche Jeannine, and killed him. M. de Jeannine was a member of a powerful family, which exerted itself to obtain justice. It put forward just such arguments as now obtain against M. de La Tour d'Azyr. As you will remember the judges held that the provocation had proceeded of intent from M. de Gesvres; they found him guilty of premeditated murder, and he was hanged."

M. de Lesdiguières exploded yet again. "Death of my life!" he cried. "Have you the effrontery to suggest that M. de La Tour d'Azyr should be hanged? Have you?"

"But why not, monsieur, if it is the law, and there is precedent for it, as I have shown you, and if it can be established that what I state is the truth—as established it can be without difficulty?"

"Do you ask me, why not? Have you temerity to ask me that?"

"I have, monsieur. Can you answer me? If you cannot, monsieur, I shall understand that whilst it is possible for a powerful family like that of La Roche Jeannine to set the law in motion, the law must remain inert for the obscure and un-influential, however brutally wronged by a great nobleman."

Monsieur de Lesdiguières perceived that in argument he would accomplish nothing against this impassive, resolute young man. The menace of him grew more fierce.

"I should advise you to take yourself off at once, and to be thankful for the opportunity to depart unscathed."

"I am, then, to understand, monsieur, that there will be no inquiry into this case? That nothing that I can say will move you?"

"You are to understand that if you are still there in two minutes it will be very much the worse for you." And Monsieur de Lesdiguières tinkled the silver handbell upon his table.

"I have informed you, monsieur, that a duel—so called—has been fought, and a man killed. It seems that I must remind you, the administrator of the King's justice, that duels are against the law, and that it is your duty to hold an inquiry. I come as the legal representative of the bereaved mother of Monsieur de Vilmorin to demand of you the inquiry that is due."

The door behind André-Louis opened softly. Monsieur de Lesdiguières, pale with anger, contained himself with difficulty.

"You seek to compel us, do you, you impudent rascal?" he growled. "You think the King's justice is to be driven headlong by the voice of any impudent roturier? I marvel at my own patience with you. But I give you a last warning, master lawyer; keep a closer guard over that insolent tongue of yours, or you will have cause very bitterly to regret its glibness." He waved a jewelled, contemptuous hand, and spoke to the usher standing behind André. "To the door!" he said shortly.

André-Louis hesitated a second. Then with a shrug he turned. This was the windmill indeed, and he a poor knight of rueful countenance. To attack it at closer quarters would mean being dashed to pieces. Yet on the threshold he turned again.

"Monsieur de Lesdiguières," said he, "may I recite to you an interesting fact in natural history! The tiger is a great lord in the jungle, and was for centuries the terror of lesser beasts, including the wolf. The wolf, himself a hunter, wearied of being hunted. He took to associating with other wolves, and then the wolves, driven to form packs for self-protection, discovered the power of the pack, and took to hunting the tiger, with disastrous results to him. You should study Buffon, Monsieur de Lesdiguières."

"I have studied a buffoon this morning, I think," was the punning sneer with which Monsieur de Lesdiguières replied. But that he conceived himself witty, it is probable he would not have condescended to reply at all. "I don't understand you," he added.

"But you will, Monsieur de Lesdiguières. You will," said André-Louis, and so departed.

CHAPTER VII

THE WIND

HE had broken his futile lance with the windmill—the image suggested by M. de Kercadiou persisted in his mind—and it was, he perceived by sheer good fortune that he had escaped without hurt. There remained the wind itself—the whirlwind. And the events in Rennes, reflex of the graver events in Nantes, had set that wind blowing in his favour.

He set out briskly to retrace his steps towards the Place

Royale, where the gathering of the populace was greatest, where, as he judged, lay the heart and brain of this commotion that was exciting the city.

But the commotion that he had left there was as nothing to the commotion which he found on his return. Then there had been a comparative hush to listen to the voice of a speaker who denounced the first and Second Estates from the pedestal of the Statue of Louis XV. Now the air was vibrant with the voice of the multitude itself, raised in anger. Here and there men were fighting with canes and fists; everywhere a fierce excitement raged, and the gendarmes sent thither by the King's Lieutenant to restore and maintain order were so much helpless flotsam in that tempestuous human ocean.

There were cries of "To the Palais! To the Palais! Down with the assassins! Down with the nobles! To the Palais!"

An artisan who stood shoulder to shoulder with him in the press enlightened André-Louis on the score of the increased excitement.

"They've shot him dead. His body is lying there where it fell at the foot of the statue. And there was another student killed not an hour ago over there by the Cathedral works. *Pardi!* If they can't prevail in one way they'll prevail in another." The man was fiercely emphatic. "They'll stop at nothing. If they can't overawe us, by God, they'll assassinate us! They are determined to conduct these States of Brittany in their own way. No interests but their own shall be considered."

André-Louis left him still talking, and clove himself a way through that human press.

At the statue's base he came upon a little cluster of students about the body of the murdered lad, all stricken with fear and helplessness.

"You here, Moreau!" said a voice.

He looked round to find himself confronted by a slight, swarthy man of little more than thirty, firm of mouth and impertinent of nose, who considered him with disapproval. It was Le Chapelier, a lawyer of Rennes, a prominent member of the Literary Chamber of that city, a forceful man, fertile in revolutionary ideas and of an exceptional gift of eloquence.

"Ah, it is you, Chapelier? Why don't you speak to them? Why don't you tell them what to do? Up with you, man!" And he pointed to the plinth.

Le Chapelier's dark, restless eyes searched the other's impassive face for some trace of the irony he suspected. They were as wide asunder as the poles these two, in their political views; and mistrusted as André-Louis was by all his colleagues

of the Literary Chamber of Rennes, he was by none mistrusted so thoroughly as by this vigorous republican. Indeed, had Le Chapelier been able to prevail against the influence of the seminarist Vilmorin, André-Louis would long since have found himself excluded from that assembly of the intellectual youth of Rennes, which he exasperated by his eternal mockery of their ideals.

So now Le Chapelier suspected mockery in that invitation, suspected it even when he failed to find traces of it on André-Louis's face, for he had learnt by experience that it was a face not often to be trusted for an indication of the real thoughts that moved behind it.

"Your notions and mine on that score can hardly coincide," said he.

"Can there be two opinions?" quoth André-Louis.

"There are usually two opinions whenever you and I are together, Moreau—more than ever now that you are the appointed delegate of a nobleman. You see what your friends have done. No doubt you approve their methods." He was coldly hostile.

André-Louis looked at him without surprise. So invariably opposed to each other in academic debates, how should Le Chapelier suspect his present intentions?

"If you won't tell them what is to be done, I will," said he.

"*Nom de Dieu!* If you want to invite a bullet from the other side, I shall not hinder you. It may help to square the account."

Scarcely were the words out than he repented them; for as if in answer to that challenge André-Louis sprang up on to the plinth. Alarmed now, for he could only suppose it to be André-Louis's intention to speak on behalf of Privilege, of which he was a publicly appointed representative, Le Chapelier clutched him by the leg to pull him down again.

"Ah, that no!" he was shouting. "Come down, you fool! Do you think we will let you ruin everything by your clowning? Come down!"

André-Louis, maintaining his position by clutching one of the legs of the bronze horse, flung his voice like a bugle-note over the heads of that seething mob.

"Citizens of Rennes, the motherland is in danger!"

The effect was electrical. A stir ran, like a ripple over water, across that froth of upturned human faces, and completest silence followed. In that great silence they looked at this slim young man, hatless, long wisps of his black hair fluttering in the breeze, his neck-cloth in disorder, his face white, his eyes on fire.

André-Louis felt a sudden surge of exultation as he realised by instinct that at one grip he had seized that crowd, and that he held it fast in the spell of his cry and his audacity.

Even Le Chapelier, though still clinging to his ankle, had ceased to tug. The reformer, though unshaken in his assumption of André-Louis's intentions, was for a moment bewildered by the first note of his appeal.

And then, slowly, impressively, in a voice that travelled clear to the ends of the square, the young lawyer of Gavrillac began to speak.

"Shuddering in horror of the vile deed here perpetrated, my voice demands to be heard by you. You have seen murder done under your eyes—the murder of one who nobly, without any thought of self, gave voice to the wrongs by which we are all oppressed. Fearing that voice, shunning the truth as foul things shun the light, our oppressors sent their agents to silence him in death."

Le Chapelier released at last his hold of André-Louis's ankle, staring up at him the while in sheer amazement. It seemed that the fellow was in earnest; serious for once; and for once on the right side. What had come to him?

"Of assassins what shall you look for but assassination? I have a tale to tell which will show that this is no new thing that you have witnessed here to-day; it will reveal to you the forces with which you have to deal. Yesterday . . ."

There was an interruption. A voice in the crowd, some twenty paces off, perhaps, was raised to shout:

"Yet another of them!"

Immediately after the voice came a pistol-shot, and a bullet flattened itself against the bronze figure just behind André-Louis.

Instantly there was turmoil in the crowd, most intense about the spot whence the shot had been fired. The assailant was one of a considerable group of the opposition, a group that found itself at once beset on every side, and hard put to it to defend him.

From the foot of the plinth rang the voice of the students making chorus to Le Chapelier, who was bidding André-Louis to seek shelter.

"Come down! Come down at once! They'll murder you as they murdered La Rivière."

"Let them!" He flung wide his arms in a gesture supremely theatrical, and laughed. "I stand here at their mercy. Let them, if they will, add mine to the blood that will presently rise up to choke them. Let them assassinate me. It is a trade

they understand. But until they do so, they shall not prevent me from speaking to you, from telling you what is to be looked for in them." And again he laughed, not merely in exultation, as they supposed who watched him from below, but also in amusement. And his amusement had two sources. One was to discover how glibly he uttered the phrases proper to whip up the emotions of a crowd; the other was in the remembrance of how the crafty Cardinal de Retz, for the purpose of inflaming popular sympathy on his behalf, had been in the habit of hiring fellows to fire upon his carriage. He was in just such case as that arch-politician. True, he had not hired the fellow to fire that pistol-shot; but he was none the less obliged to him, and ready to derive the fullest advantage from the act.

The group that sought to protect the assassin was battling on, seeking to hew a way out of that angry, heaving press.

"Let them go!" André-Louis called down. "What matters one murderer more or less? Let them go, and listen to me, my countrymen."

And presently, when some measure of order was restored, he began his tale. In simple language now, yet with a vehemence and directness that drove home every point, he tore their hearts with the story of yesterday's happenings at Gavrillac. He drew tears from them with the pathos of his picture of the bereaved widow Mabey and her three starving destitute children—"orphaned to avenge the death of a pheasant"—and the bereaved mother of that M. de Vilmorin, a student of Rennes, known here to many of them, who had met his death in a noble endeavour to champion the cause of an esurient member of their afflicted order.

"The Marquis de La Tour d'Azyr said of him that he had too dangerous a gift of eloquence, and to silence his brave voice he killed him. But he has failed of his object. For I, poor Philippe de Vilmorin's friend, have assumed the mantle of his apostleship, and I speak to you with his voice to-day."

It was a statement that helped Le Chapelier at last to understand, at least in part, this bewildering change in André-Louis, which rendered him faithless to the side that employed him.

"I am not here," continued André-Louis, "merely to demand at your hands vengeance upon Philippe de Vilmorin's murderers. I am here to tell you the things he would to-day have told you had he lived."

So far at least he was frank. But he did not add that they were things he did not himself believe, things that he accounted the cant by which an ambitious bourgeoisie—speaking through the mouths of the lawyers, who were its articulate part—sought

to overthrow to its own advantage the present state of things. He left his audience in the natural belief that the views he expressed were the views he held.

And now in a terrible voice, with an eloquence that amazed himself, he denounced the inertia of the royal justice where the great are the offenders. It was with bitter sarcasm that he spoke of their King's Lieutenant, M. de Lesdiguières.

"Do you wonder," he asked them, "that M. de Lesdiguières should administer the law so that it shall ever be favourable to our great nobles? Would it be just, would it be reasonable, that he should otherwise administer it?"

He paused dramatically to let his sarcasm sink in. It had the effect of re-awakening Le Chapelier's doubts, and checking his dawning conviction in André-Louis's sincerity. Whither was he going now?

He was not left long in doubt. Proceeding, André-Louis spoke as he conceived that Philippe de Vilmorin would have spoken. He had so often argued with him, so often attended the discussions of the Literary Chamber, that he had all the cant of the reformer—that was yet true in substance—at his fingers' ends.

"Consider, after all, the composition of this France of ours. A million of its inhabitants are members of the privileged classes. They compose France. They are France. For surely you cannot suppose the remainder to be anything that matters? It cannot be pretended that twenty-four million souls are of any account, that they can be representative of this great nation, or that they can exist for any purpose but that of servitude to the million elect."

Bitter laughter shook them now, as he desired it should.

"Seeing their privileges in danger of invasion by these twenty-four millions—mostly *canaille*; possibly created by God, it is true, but clearly so created to be the slaves of Privilege—does it surprise you that the dispensing of royal justice should be placed in the stout hands of these Lesdiguières, men without brains to think or hearts to be touched? Consider what it is that must be defended against the assault of us others—*canaille*. Consider a few of these feudal rights that are in danger of being swept away should the Privileged yield even to the commands of their sovereign, and admit the Third Estate to an equal vote with themselves

"What would become of the right of terrage on the land, of *parcière* on the fruit-trees, of *carpot* on the vines? What of the *corvées* by which they command forced labour, of the

which enables them to control to their own advantage the sale of wine? What of their right of grinding the last liard of taxation out of the people to maintain their own opulent estate; the cens, the lods et ventes, which absorb a fifth of the value of the land, the blairée, which must be paid before herds can feed on communal lands, the pulvéraage to indemnify them for the dust raised on their roads by the herds that go to market, the sextélaage on everything offered for sale in the public markets, the étallonaage, and all the rest? What of their rights over men and animals for field labour, of ferries over rivers, and of bridges over streams, of sinking wells, of warren, of dovecot and of fire, which last yields them a tax on every peasant hearth? What of their exclusive rights of fishing and of hunting, the violation of which is ranked as almost a capital offence?

"And what of their rights, unspeakable, abominable, over the lives and bodies of their people, rights which if rarely exercised have never been rescinded? To this day, if a noble returning from the hunt were to slay two of his serfs to bathe and refresh his feet in their blood, he could still claim in his sufficient defence that it was his absolute feudal right to do so.

"Rough-shod, these million Privileged ride over the souls and bodies of twenty-four million contemptible canaille existing but for their own pleasure. Woe betide him who so much as raises his voice in protest in the name of humanity against an excess of these already excessive abuses. I have told you of one remorselessly slain in cold blood for doing no more than that. Your own eyes have witnessed the assassination of another here upon this plinth, of yet another over there by the Cathedral works, and the attempt upon my own life.

"Between them and the justice due to them in such cases stand these Lesdiguières, these King's Lieutenants; not instruments of justice, but walls erected for the shelter of Privilege and Abuse whenever it exceeds its grotesquely excessive rights.

"Do you wonder that they will not yield an inch; that they will resist the election of a Third Estate with the voting power to sweep all these privileges away, to compel Privilege to submit to a just equality in the eyes of the law with the meanest of the canaille it tramples underfoot, to provide that the moneys necessary to save this State from the bankruptcy into which Privilege has all but plunged it shall be raised by taxation to be borne by themselves in the same proportion as by others?

"Sooner than yield to so much they prefer to resist even the royal command."

A phrase occurred to him, used yesterday by Vilmorin, a phrase to which he had refused to attach importance when uttered then. He used it now. "In doing this they are striking at the very foundations of the throne. These fools do not perceive that if that throne falls over, it is they who stand nearest to it who will be crushed."

A terrific roar acclaimed that statement. Tense and quivering with the excitement that was flowing through him, and from him out into that great audience, he stood a moment smiling ironically. Then he waved them into silence, and saw by their ready obedience how completely he possessed them. For in the voice with which he spoke each now recognised the voice of himself, giving at last expression to the thoughts that for months and years had been inarticulately stirring in each simple mind.

Presently he resumed, speaking more quietly, that ironic smile about the corner of his mouth growing more marked.

"In taking my leave of Monsieur de Lesdiguières I gave him warning out of a page of natural history. I told him that when the wolves, roaming singly through the jungle, were weary of being hunted by the tiger, they banded themselves into packs, and went a-hunting the tiger in their turn. Monsieur de Lesdiguières contemptuously answered that he did not understand me. But your wits are better than his. You understand me, I think? Don't you?"

Again a great roar, mingled now with some approving laughter, was his answer. He had wrought them up to a pitch of dangerous passion, and they were ripe for any violence to which he urged them. If he had failed with the windmill, at least he was now master of the wind.

"To the Palais!" they shouted, waving their hands, brandishing canes, and—here and there—even a sword. "To the Palais! Down with Monsieur de Lesdiguières! Death to the King's Lieutenant!"

He was master of the wind, indeed. His dangerous gift of oratory—a gift nowhere more powerful than in France, since nowhere else are men's emotions so quick to respond to the appeal of eloquence—had given him his mastery. At his bidding now the gale would sweep away the windmill against which he had flung himself in vain. But that, as he straight-forwardly revealed it, was no part of his intent.

"Ah, wait!" he bade them. "Is this miserable instrument of a corrupt system worth the attention of your noble indignation?"

He hoped his words would be reported to M. de Lesdiguières.

He thought it would be good for the soul of M. de Lesdiguières to hear the undiluted truth about himself for once. "It is the system itself you must attack and overthrow; not a mere instrument—a miserable painted lath such as this. And precipitancy will spoil everything. Above all, my children, no violence!"

My children! Could his godfather have heard him!

"You have seen often already the result of premature violence elsewhere in Brittany, and you have heard of it elsewhere in France. Violence on your part will call for violence on theirs. They will welcome the chance to assert their mastery by a firmer grip than heretofore. The military will be sent for. You will be faced by the bayonet of mercenaries. Do not provoke that, I implore you. Do not put it into their power; do not afford them the pretext they would welcome, to crush you down into the mud of your own blood."

Out of the silence into which they had fallen anew broke now the cry of:

"What else, then? What else?"

"I will tell you," he answered them. "The wealth and strength of Brittany lies in Nantes—a bourgeois city, one of the most prosperous in this realm, rendered so by the energy of the bourgeoisie and the toil of the people. It was in Nantes that this movement had its beginning, and as a result of it the King issued his order dissolving the States as now constituted—an order which those who base their power on privilege and abuse do not hesitate to thwart. Let Nantes be informed of the precise situation, and let nothing be done here until Nantes shall have given us the lead. She has the power—which we in Rennes have not—to make her will prevail, as we have seen already. Let her exert that power once more, and until she does so do you keep the peace in Rennes. Thus shall you triumph. Thus shall the outrages that are being perpetrated under your eyes be fully and finally avenged."

As abruptly as he had leapt upon the plinth did he now leap down from it. He had finished. He had said all—perhaps more than all—that could have been said by the dead friend with whose voice he spoke. But it was not their will that he should thus extinguish himself. The thunder of their acclamations rose deafeningly upon the air. He had played upon their emotions—each in turn—as a skilful harpist plays upon the strings of his instrument. And they were vibrant with the passions he had aroused and the high note of hope on which he had brought his symphony to a close.

A dozen students caught him as he leapt down, and swung

him to their shoulders, where again he came within view of all the acclaiming crowd.

The delicate Chapelier pressed alongside of him with flushed face and shining eyes.

"My lad," he said to him, "you have kindled a fire to-day that will sweep the face of France in a blaze of liberty." And then to the students he issued a sharp command: "To the Literary Chamber—at once! We must concert measures upon the instant, a delegate must be dispatched to Nantes forthwith, to convey to our friends there the message of the people of Rennes."

The crowd fell back, opening a lane through which the students bore the hero of the hour. Waving his hands to them, he called upon them to disperse to their homes, and await there in patience what must follow very soon.

"You have endured for centuries with a fortitude that is a pattern to the world," he flattered them. "Endure a little longer yet. The end, my friends, is well in sight at last."

They carried him out of the square and up the Rue Royale to an old house, one of the few old houses surviving in that city that had risen from its ashes, where in an upper chamber lighted by diamond-shaped panes of yellow glass the Literary Chamber usually held its meetings. Thither in his wake the members of that Chamber came hurrying, summoned by the messages that Chapelier had issued during their progress.

Behind closed doors a flushed and excited group of some fifty men, the majority of whom were young, ardent, and afire with the illusion of liberty, hailed André-Louis as the strayed sheep who had returned to the fold, and smothered him in congratulations and thanks.

Then they settled down to deliberate upon immediate measures, whilst the doors below were kept by a guard of honour that had improvised itself from the masses. And very necessary was this. For no sooner had the Chamber assembled than the house was assailed by the gendarmerie of M. de Lesdiguières, dispatched in haste to arrest the firebrand who was inciting the people of Rennes to sedition. The force consisted of fifty men. Five hundred would have been too few. The mob broke their carbines, broke some of their heads, and would indeed have torn them into pieces had they not beaten a timely and well-advised retreat before a form of horseplay to which they were not at all accustomed.

And whilst this was taking place in the street below, in the room above-stairs the eloquent Le Chapelier was addressing his colleagues of the Literary Chamber. Here, with no bullets

to fear, and no one to report his words to the authorities, Le Chapelier could permit his oratory a full, unintimidated flow. And that considerable oratory was as direct and brutal as the man himself was delicate and elegant.

He praised the vigour and greatness of the speech they had heard from their colleague Moreau. Above all, he praised its wisdom. Moreau's words had come as a surprise to them. Hitherto they had never known him as other than a bitter critic of their projects of reform and regeneration; and quite lately they had heard, not without misgivings, of his appointment as delegate for a nobleman in the States of Brittany. But they held the explanation of his conversion. The murder of their dear colleague Vilmorin had produced this change. In that brutal deed Moreau had beheld at last in true proportions the workings of the evil spirit which they were vowed to exorcise from France. And to-day he had proven himself the stoutest apostle among them of the new faith. He had pointed out to them the only sane and useful course. The illustration he had borrowed from natural history was most apt. Above all, let them pack like the wolves, and to ensure this uniformity of action in the people of all Brittany, let a delegate at once be sent to Nantes, which had already proved itself the real seat of Brittany's power. It but remained to appoint that delegate, and Le Chapelier invited them to do so.

André-Louis, on a bench near the window, a prey now to some measure of reaction, listened in bewilderment to that flood of eloquence.

As the applause died down, he heard a voice exclaiming: "I propose to you that we appoint our leader here, Chapelier, to be that delegate."

Le Chapelier reared his elegantly dressed head, which had been bowed in thought, and it was seen that his countenance was pale. Nervously he fingered a gold spy-glass.

"My friends," he said slowly, "I am deeply sensible of the honour that you do me. But in accepting it, I should be usurping an honour that rightly belongs elsewhere. Who could represent us better, who more deserving to be our representative, to speak to our friends of Nantes with the voice of Rennes, than the champion who once already to-day has so incomparably given utterance to the voice of this great city? Confer this honour of being your spokesman where it belongs—upon André-Louis Moreau."

Rising in response to the storm of applause that greeted the proposal, André-Louis bowed and forthwith yielded.

"Be it so," he said simply. "It is perhaps fitting that

I should carry out what I have begun, though I, too, am of the opinion that Le Chapelier would have been a worthier representative. I will set out to-night."

"You will set out at once, my lad," Le Chapelier informed him, and now revealed what an uncharitable mind might account the true source of his generosity. "It is not safe after what has happened for you to linger an hour in Rennes. And you must go secretly. Let none of you allow it to be known that he has gone. I would not have you come to harm over this, André-Louis. But you must see the risks you run, and if you are to be spared to help us in this work of salvation of our afflicted motherland, you must use caution, move secretly, veil your identity even. Or else Monsieur de Lesdiguières will have you laid by the heels, and it will be good-night for you."

CHAPTER VIII

OMNES OMNIBUS

ANDRÉ-LOUIS rode forth from Rennes committed to a deeper adventure than he had dreamed of when he left the sleepy village of Gavrillac.

Lying the night at a roadside inn, and setting out again early in the morning, he reached Nantes soon after noon of the following day.

Through that long and lonely ride through the dull plains of Brittany, now at their dreariest in their winter garb, he had ample leisure in which to review his actions and his position. From one who had taken hitherto a purely academic and by no means friendly interest in the new philosophies of social life, exercising his wits upon these new ideas merely as a fencer exercises his eye and wrist with the foils, without ever suffering himself to be deluded into supposing the issue a real one, he found himself suddenly converted into a revolutionary fire-brand, committed to revolutionary action of the most desperate kind. The representative and delegate of a nobleman in the States of Brittany, he found himself simultaneously and incongruously the representative and delegate of the whole Third Estate of Rennes.

It is difficult to determine to what extent, in the heat of passion, and swept along by the torrent of his own oratory,

he might yesterday have succeeded in deceiving himself. But it is at least certain that, looking back in cold blood now, he had no single delusion on the score of what he had done. Cynically he had presented to his audience one side only of the great question that he propounded.

But since the established order of things in France was such as to make a rampart for M. de La Tour d'Azyr, affording him complete immunity for any crime that it pleased him to commit, why then the established order must take the consequences of its wrong-doing. Therein he perceived his clear justification. And so it was without misgivings that he came on his errand of sedition into that beautiful city of Nantes, rendered by its spacious streets and splendid port the rival in prosperity of Bordeaux and Marseilles.

He found an inn on the Quai La Fosse, where he put up his horse, and where he dined in the embrasure of a window that looked out over the tree-bordered quay and the broad bosom of the Loire, on which argosies of all nations rode at anchor. The sun had again broken through the clouds, and shed its pale wintry light over the yellow waters and the tall-masted shipping.

Along the quays there was a stir of life as great as that to be seen on the quays of Paris. Foreign sailors in outlandish garments and of harsh-sounding, outlandish speech, stalwart fishwives with baskets of herrings on their heads, voluminous of petticoat above bare legs and bare feet, calling their wares shrilly and almost inarticulately, watermen in woollen caps and loose trousers rolled to the knees, peasants in goatskin coats, their wooden shoes clattering on the round kidney-stones, shipwrights and labourers from the dockyards, bellows-menders, rat-catchers, water-carriers, ink-sellers, and other itinerant pedlars. And, sprinkled through this proletariat mass that came and went in constant movement, André-Louis beheld tradesmen in sober garments, merchants in long fur-lined coats; occasionally a merchant-prince rolling along in his two-horse cabriolet to the whip-crackings and shouts of "Gare!" from his coachman; occasionally a dainty lady carried past in her sedan-chair, with perhaps a mincing abbé from the episcopal court tripping along in attendance; occasionally an officer in scarlet riding disdainfully; and once the great carriage of a nobleman, with escutcheoned panels and a pair of white-stockinged, powdered footmen in gorgeous liveries hanging on behind. And there were Capuchins in brown and Benedictines in black, and secular priests in plenty—for God was well served in the sixteen parishes of Nantes—and by way of contrast there were lean-jawed, out-at-elbow

adventurers, and gendarmes in blue coats and gaitered legs, sauntering guardians of the peace.

Representatives of every class that went to make up the seventy thousand inhabitants of that wealthy industrious city were to be seen in the human stream that ebbed and flowed beneath the window from which André-Louis observed it.

Of the waiter who ministered to his humble wants with soup and bouilli, and a measure of vin gris, André-Louis inquired into the state of public feeling in the city. The waiter, a staunch supporter of the privileged orders, admitted regretfully that an uneasiness prevailed. Much would depend upon what happened at Rennes. If it was true that the King had dissolved the States of Brittany, then all would be well and the malcontents would have no pretext for further disturbances. There had been trouble and to spare in Nantes already. They wanted no repetition of it. All manner of rumours were abroad, and since early morning there had been crowds besieging the portals of the Chamber of Commerce for definite news. But definite news was yet to come. It was not even known for a fact that his Majesty actually had dissolved the States.

It was striking, too, the busiest hour of the day upon the Bourse, when André-Louis reached the Place du Commerce. The square, dominated by the imposing classical building of the Exchange, was so crowded that he was compelled almost to fight his way through to the steps of the magnificent Ionic porch. A word would have sufficed to have opened a way for him at once. But guile moved him to keep silent. He would come upon that waiting multitude as a thunder-clap, precisely as yesterday he had come upon the mob at Rennes. He desired to lose nothing of the surprise effect of his entrance.

The precincts of that House of Commerce were jealously kept by a line of ushers armed with staves, a guard as hurriedly assembled by the merchants as it was evidently necessary. One of these now effectively barred the young lawyer's passage as he attempted to mount the steps.

André-Louis announced himself in a whisper.

The staff was instantly raised from the horizontal and he passed and went up the steps in the wake of the usher. At the top, on the threshold of the chamber, he paused, and stayed his guide.

"I will wait here," he announced. "Bring the president to me."

"Your name, monsieur?"

Almost had André-Louis answered him, when he remembered Le Chapelier's warning of the danger with which his mission

was fraught and Le Chapelier's parting admonition to conceal his identity.

"My name is unknown to him ; it matters nothing. I am the mouthpiece of a people, no more. Go."

The usher went, and in the shadow of that lofty, pillared portico André-Louis waited, his eyes straying out ever and anon to survey that spread of upturned faces immediately below him.

Soon the president came, others following, crowding out into the portico, jostling one another in their eagerness to hear the news.

"You are a messenger from Rennes ? "

"I am the delegate sent by the Literary Chamber of that city to inform you here in Nantes of what is taking place."

"Your name ? "

André-Louis paused. "The less we mention names, perhaps, the better."

The president's eyes grew big with gravity. He was a corpulent, florid man, purse-proud and self-sufficient.

He hesitated a moment. Then : "Come into the Chamber," said he.

"By your leave, monsieur, I will deliver my message from here—from these steps."

"From here ? " The great merchant frowned.

"My message is for the people of Nantes, and from here I can speak at once to the greatest number of Nantais of all ranks ; and it is my desire—and the desire of those whom I represent—that as great a number as possible should hear my message at first hand."

"Tell me, sir, is it true that the King has dissolved the States ? "

André-Louis looked at him. He smiled apologetically, and waved a hand towards the crowd, which by now was straining for a glimpse of this slim young man who had brought forth the president and more than half the members of the Chamber, guessing already, with that curious instinct of crowds, that he was the awaited bearer of tidings.

"Summon the gentlemen of your Chamber, monsieur," said he, "and you shall hear all."

"So be it."

A word, and forth they came to crowd upon the steps, but leaving clear the topmost step and a half-moon space in the middle.

To the spot so indicated André-Louis now advanced very deliberately. He took his stand there, dominating the entire

assembly. He removed his hat, and launched the opening bombshell of that address which is historic, marking as it does one of the great stages of France's progress towards revolution.

"People of this great city of Nantes, I have come to summon you to arms!"

In the amazed and rather scared silence that followed he surveyed them for a moment before resuming.

"I am a delegate of the people of Rennes, charged to announce to you what is taking place, and to invite you in this dreadful hour of our country's peril to rise and march to her defence."

"Name! Your name!" a voice shouted, and instantly the cry was taken up by others, until the multitude rang with the question.

He could not answer that excited mob as he had answered the president. It was necessary to compromise, and he did so, happily. "My name," said he, "is Omnes Omnibus—all for all. Let that suffice you now. I am a herald, a mouth-piece, a voice—no more. I come to announce to you that since the privileged orders, assembled for the States of Brittany in Rennes, resisted your will—our will—despite the King's plain hint to them, His Majesty has dissolved the States."

There was a burst of delirious applause. Men laughed and shouted, and cries of "Vive le Roi!" rolled forth like thunder. André-Louis waited, and gradually the preternatural gravity of his countenance came to be observed, and to beget the suspicion that there might be more to follow. Gradually silence was restored, and at last André-Louis was able to proceed.

"You rejoice too soon. Unfortunately the nobles, in their insolent arrogance, have elected to ignore the royal dissolution, and in despite of it persist in sitting and in conducting matters as seems good to them."

A silence of utter dismay greeted that disconcerting epilogue to the announcement that had been so rapturously received. André-Louis continued after a moment's pause:

"So that these men who were already rebels against the people, rebels against justice and equity, rebels against humanity itself, are now also rebels against their King. Sooner than yield an inch of the unconscionable privileges by which too long already they have flourished, to the misery of a whole nation, they will make a mock of royal authority, hold up the King himself to contempt. They are determined to prove that there is no real sovereignty in France but the sovereignty of their own parasitic fainéantise."

There was a faint splutter of applause, but the majority of the audience remained silent, waiting.

"This is no new thing. Always has it been the same. No minister in the last ten years, who, seeing the needs and perils of the state, counselled the measures that we now demand as the only means of arresting our motherland in its ever-quickenning progress to the abyss, but found himself as a consequence cast out of office by the influence which Privilege brought to bear against him. Twice already has Monsieur Necker been called to the Ministry, to be twice dismissed when his insistent counsels of reform threatened the privileges of clergy and nobility. For the third time now has he been called to office, and at last it seems we are to have States General in spite of Privilege. But what the privileged orders can no longer prevent, they are determined to stultify. Since it is now a settled thing that these States General are to meet, at least the nobles and the clergy will see to it—unless we take measures to prevent them—by packing the Third Estate with their own creatures, and denying it all effective representation, that they convert the States General into an instrument of their own will for the perpetuation of the abuses by which they live. To achieve this end they will stop at nothing. They have flouted the authority of the King, and they are silencing by assassination those who raise their voices to condemn them. Yesterday in Rennes two young men who addressed the people as I am addressing you were done to death in the streets by assassins at the instigation of the nobility. Their blood cries out for vengeance."

Beginning in a sullen mutter, the indignation that moved his hearers swelled up to express itself in a roar of anger.

"Citizens of Nantes, the motherland is in peril. Let us march to her defence. Let us proclaim it to the world that we recognise that the measures to liberate the Third Estate from the slavery in which for centuries it has groaned find only obstacles in those orders whose phrenetic egotism sees in the tears and suffering of the unfortunate an adious tribute which they would pass on to their generations still unborn. Realising from the barbarity of the means employed by our enemies to perpetuate our oppression that we have everything to fear from the aristocracy they would set up as a constitutional principle for the governing of France, let us declare ourselves at once enfranchised from it.

"The establishment of liberty and equality should be the aim of every citizen member of the Third Estate; and to this end we should stand indivisibly united, especially the young and vigorous, especially those who have had the good fortune to be born late enough to be able to gather for themselves the precious fruits of the philosophy of this eighteenth century."

Acclamations broke out unstintedly now. He had caught them in the snare of his oratory. And he pressed his advantage instantly.

"Let us all swear," he cried in a great voice, "to raise up in the name of humanity and of liberty a rampart against our enemies, to oppose to their bloodthirsty covetousness the calm perseverance of men whose cause is just. And let us protest here and in advance against any tyrannical decrees that should declare us seditious when we have none but pure and just intentions. Let us make oath upon the honour of our motherland that should any of us be seized by an unjust tribunal, intending against us one of those acts termed of political expediency—which are, in effect, but acts of despotism—let us swear, I say, to give a full expression to the strength that is in us and do that in self-defence which nature, courage and despair dictate to us."

Loud and long rolled the applause that greeted his conclusion, and he observed with satisfaction and even some inward grim amusement that the wealthy merchants who had been congregated upon the steps, and who now came crowding about him to shake him by the hand and to acclaim him, were not merely participants in, but the actual leaders of, this delirium of enthusiasm.

It confirmed him, had he needed confirmation, in his conviction that just as the philosophies upon which this new movement was based had their source in thinkers extracted from the bourgeoisie, so the need to adopt those philosophies to the practical purposes of life was most acutely felt at present by that same bourgeoisie which found itself debarred by Privilege from the expansion its wealth permitted. If it might be said of André-Louis that he had that day lighted the torch of the Revolution in Nantes, it might with even greater truth be said that the torch itself was supplied by the opulent bourgeoisie.

I need not dwell at any length upon the sequel. It is a matter of history how that oath which Omnes Omnibus administered to the citizens of Nantes formed the backbone of the formal protest which they drew up and signed in their thousands. Nor were the results of that powerful protest—which, after all, might already be said to harmonise with the expressed will of the sovereign himself—long delayed. Who shall say how far it may have strengthened the hand of Necker, when on the 27th of that same month of November he compelled the Council to adopt the most significant and comprehensive of all those measures to which clergy and nobility had refused their consent? On that date was published the royal decree ordaining that the

deputies to be elected to the States General should number at least one thousand, and that the deputies of the Third Estate should be fully representative by numbering as many as the deputies of clergy and nobility together.

CHAPTER IX

THE AFTERMATH

DUSK of the following day was failing when the homing André-Louis approached Gavrillac. Realising fully what a hue-and-cry there would presently be for the apostle of revolution who had summoned the people of Nantes to arms, he desired as far as possible to conceal the fact that he had been in that maritime city. Therefore he made a wide détour, crossing the river at Bruz, and recrossing it a little above Chavagne, so as to approach Gavrillac from the north and create the impression that he was returning from Rennes whither he was known to have gone two days ago.

Within a mile or so of the village, he caught in the fading light his first glimpse of a figure on horseback pacing slowly towards him. But it was not until they had come within a few yards of each other, and he observed that this cloaked figure was leaning forward to peer at him, that he took much notice of it. And then he found himself challenged almost at once by a woman's voice.

"It is you, André—at last!"

He drew rein, mildly surprised, to be assailed by another question, impatiently, anxiously asked.

"Where have you been?"

"Where have I been, Cousin Aline? Oh . . . seeing the world."

"I have been patrolling this road since noon to-day, waiting for you." She spoke breathlessly, in haste to explain. "A troop of the *maréchaussée* from Rennes descended upon Gavrillac this morning in quest of you. They turned the château and the village inside out, and at last discovered that you were due to return with a horse hired from the Bréton Armé. So they have taken up their quarters at the inn to wait for you. I have been here all the afternoon on the look-out, to warn you against walking into that trap."

"My dear Aline! That I should have been the cause of so much concern and trouble!"

"Never mind that. It is not important."

"On the contrary; it is the most important part of what you tell me. It is the rest that is unimportant."

"Do you realise that they have come to arrest you?" she asked him, with increasing impatience. "You are wanted for sedition, and upon a warrant from M. de Lesdiguières."

"Sedition?" quoth he, and his thoughts flew to that business at Nantes. It was impossible they could have had news of it in Rennes and acted upon it in so short a time.

"Yes, sedition. The sedition of that wicked speech of yours at Rennes on Wednesday."

"Oh, that!" said he. "Pooh!" His note of relief might have told her, had she been more attentive, that he had to fear the consequences of a greater wickedness committed since. "Why that was nothing."

"Nothing?"

"I almost suspect that the real intentions of these gentlemen of the *maréchaussée* have been misunderstood. Most probably they have come to thank me on M. de Lesdiguières's behalf. I restrained the people when they would have burnt the Palais and himself inside it."

"After you had first incited them to do it. I suppose you were afraid of work. You drew back at the last moment. But you said things of M. de Lesdiguières, if you are correctly reported, which he will never forgive."

"I see," said André-Louis, and he fell into thought.

But Mademoiselle de Kercadiou had already done what thinking was necessary, and her alert young mind had settled all that was to be done.

"You must not go into Gavrillic," she told him, "and you must get down from your horse, and let me take it. I will stable it at the château to-night. And some time to-morrow afternoon, by when you should be well away, I will return it to the Bréton Armé."

"Oh, but that is impossible."

"Impossible? Why?"

"For several reasons. One of them is that you haven't considered what will happen to you if you do such a thing."

"To me? Do you suppose I am afraid of that pack of oafs sent by M. Lesdiguières? I have committed no sedition."

"But it is almost as bad to give aid to one who is wanted for the crime. That is the law."

"What do I care for the law? Do you imagine that the law will presume to touch me?"

"Of course, there is that. You are sheltered by one of the abuses I complained of at Rennes. I was forgetting."

"Complain of it as much as you please, but meanwhile profit by it. Come, André, do as I tell you. Get down from your horse." And then, as he still hesitated, she stretched out and caught him by the arm. Her voice was vibrant with earnestness. "André, you don't realise how serious is your position. If these people take you, it is almost certain that you will be hanged. Don't you realise it? You must not go to Gavrilac. You must go away at once, and lie completely lost for a time until this blows over. Indeed, until my uncle can bring influence to bear to obtain your pardon, you must keep in hiding."

"That will be a long time, then," said André-Louis. "M. de Kercadiou has never cultivated friends at Court."

"There is M. de La Tour d'Azyr," she reminded him, to his astonishment.

"That man!" he cried, and then he laughed. "But it was chiefly against him that I aroused the resentment of the people of Rennes. I should have known that all my speech was not reported to you."

"It was, and that part of it among the rest."

"Ah! And yet you are concerned to save me, the man who seeks the life of your future husband at the hands either of the law or of the people? Or is it, perhaps, that since you have seen his true nature revealed in the murder of poor Philippe, you have changed your views on the subject of becoming Marquise de La Tour d'Azyr?"

"You often show yourself without any faculty of deductive reasoning."

"Perhaps. But hardly to the extent of imagining that M. de La Tour d'Azyr will ever lift a finger to do as you suggest."

"In which, as usual, you are wrong. He will certainly do so if I ask him."

"If you ask him?" Sheer horror rang in his voice.

"Why, yes. You see, I have not yet said that I will be Marquise de La Tour d'Azyr. I am still considering. It is a position that has its advantages. One of them is that it ensures a suitor's complete obedience."

"So, so. I see the crooked logic of your mind. You might go so far as to say to him: 'Refuse me this, and I shall

refuse to be your Marquise.' You would go so far as that?"

"At need, I might."

"And do you not see the converse implication? Do you not see that your hands would then be tied, that you would be wanting in honour if afterwards you refused him? And do you think that I would consent to anything that could so tie your hands? Do you think I want to see you damned, Aline?"

Her hand fell away from his arm.

"Oh, you are mad!" she exclaimed, quite out of patience.

"Possibly. But I like my madness. There is a thrill in it unknown to such sanity as yours. By your leave, Aline, I think I will ride on to Gavrillac."

"André, you must not! It is death to you!" In her alarm she backed her horse, and pulled it across the road to bar his way.

It was almost completely night by now; but from behind the wrack of clouds overhead a crescent moon sailed out to alleviate the darkness.

"Come now," she enjoined him. "Be reasonable. Do as I bid you. See, there is a carriage coming up behind you. Do not let us be found here together thus."

He made up his mind quickly. He was not the man to be actuated by false heroics about dying, and he had no fancy whatever for the gallows of M. de Lesdiguières's providing. The immediate task that he had set himself might be accomplished. He had made heard—and ringingly—the voice that M. de La Tour d'Azyr imagined he had silenced. But he was very far from having done with life.

"Aline, on one condition only."

"And that?"

"That you swear to me you will never seek the aid of M. de La Tour d'Azyr on my behalf."

"Since you insist, and as time presses, I consent. And now ride on with me as far as the lane. There is that carriage coming up."

The lane to which she referred was one that branched off the road some three hundred yards nearer the village and led straight up the hill to the château itself. In silence they rode together towards it, and together they turned into that thickly hedged and narrow bypath. At a depth of fifty yards she halted him.

"Now!" she bade him.

Obediently he swung down from his horse and surrendered the reins to her.

"Aline," he said, "I haven't words in which to thank you."

"It isn't necessary," said she.

"But I shall hope to repay you some day."

"Nor is that necessary. Could I do less than I am doing? I do not want to hear of you hanged, André, nor does my uncle, though he is very angry with you."

"I suppose he is."

"And you can be hardly surprised. You were his delegate, his representative. He depended upon you, and you have turned your coat. He is rightly indignant, calls you a traitor and swears that he will never speak to you again. But he doesn't want you hanged, André."

"Then we are agreed on that at least; for I don't want it myself."

"I'll make your peace with him. And now—good-bye, André. Send me a word when you are safe."

She held out a hand that looked ghostly in the faint light. He took it and bore it to his lips.

"God bless you, Aline."

She was gone, and he stood listening to the receding clatter of hooves until it grew faint in the distance. Then slowly, with shoulders hunched and head sunk on his breast, he retraced his steps to the main road, cogitating whither he should go. Quite suddenly he checked, remembering with dismay that he was almost entirely without money. In Brittany itself he knew of no dependable hiding-place, and as long as he was in Brittany his peril must remain imminent. Yet to leave the province, and to leave it as quickly as prudence dictated, horses would be necessary. And how was he to procure horses, having no money beyond a single louis d'or and a few pieces of silver?

There was also the fact that he was very weary. He had had little sleep since Tuesday night, and not very much then; and much of the time had been spent in the saddle, a wearing thing to one so little accustomed to long rides. Worn as he was, it was unthinkable that he should go far to-night. He might get as far as Chavagne, perhaps. But there he must sup and sleep; and what, then, of to-morrow?

Had he but thought of it before, perhaps Aline might have been able to assist him with the loan of a few louis. His first impulse now was to follow her to the château. But prudence dismissed the notion. Before he could reach her, he must be

seen by servants, and word of his presence would go forth.

There was no choice for him; he must tramp as far as Chavagne, find a bed there, and leave to-morrow until it dawned. On the resolve he set his face in the direction whence he had come. But again he paused. Chavagne lay on the road to Rennes. To go that way was to plunge further into danger. He would strike south again. At the foot of some meadows on this side of the village there was a ferry that would put him across the river. Thus he would avoid the village, and by placing the river between himself and the immediate danger, he would obtain an added sense of security.

A lane, turning out of the high road, a quarter of a mile this side of Gavrilac, led down to that ferry. By this lane some twenty minutes later came André-Louis with dragging feet. He avoided the little cottage of the ferryman, whose window was alight, and in the dark crept down to the boat, intending if possible to put himself across. He felt for the chain by which the boat was moored, and ran his fingers along this to the point where it was fastened. Here to his dismay he found a padlock.

He stood up in the gloom and laughed silently. Of course, he might have known it. The ferry was the property of M. de La Tour d'Azyr, and not likely to be left unfastened so that poor devils might cheat him of seigneurial dues.

There being no possible alternative, he walked back to the cottage and rapped on the door. When it opened he stood well back, and aside, out of the shaft of light that issued thence

"Ferry!" he rapped out, laconically.

The ferryman, a burly scoundrel well known to him, turned aside to pick up a lantern, and came forth as he was bidden. As he stepped from the little porch, he raised the lantern so that the light fell on the face of his traveller

"My God!" he ejaculated.

"You realise, I see, that I am pressed," said André-Louis, his eyes on the fellow's startled countenance.

"And well you may be with the gallows waiting for you at Rennes," growled the ferryman. "Since you've been so foolish as to come back to Gavrilac, you had better go again as quickly as you can. I will say nothing of having seen you."

"I thank you, Fresnel. Your advice accords with my intention. That is why I need the boat."

"Ah, that no," said Fresnel, with determination. "I'll hold my peace, but it's as much as my skin is worth to help you."

"You need not have seen my face. Forget that you have seen it."

"I'll do that, monsieur. But that is all I will do. I cannot put you across the river."

"Then give me the key of the boat, and I will put myself across."

"That is the same thing. I cannot. I'll hold my tongue, but I will not—I dare not—help you."

André-Louis looked a moment into that sullen, resolute face, and understood. This man, living under the shadow of La Tour d'Azyr, dared exercise no will that might be in conflict with the will of his dread Lord.

"Fresnel," he said, quietly, "if, as you say, the gallows claim me, the thing that has brought me to this extremity arises out of the shooting of Mabey. Had not Mabey been murdered there would have been no need for me to have raised my voice as I have done. Mabey was your friend, I think. Will you for his sake lend me the little help I need to save my neck?"

The man kept his glance averted, and the cloud of sullenness deepened on his face.

"I would if I dared, but I dare not." Then quite suddenly he became angry. It was as if in anger he sought support. "Don't you understand that I dare not? Would you have a poor man risk his life for you? What have you or yours ever done for me that you should ask that? You do not cross to-night in my ferry. Understand that, monsieur, and go at once—go before I remember that it may be dangerous even to have talked to you and not give information. Go!"

He turned on his heel to re-enter his cottage, and a wave of hopelessness swept over André-Louis.

But in a second it was gone. The man must be compelled, and he had the means. He bethought him of a pistol pressed upon him by Le Chapelier at the moment of his leaving Rennes, a gift which at the time he had almost disdained. True it was not loaded, and he had no ammunition. But how was Fresnel to know that?

He acted quickly. As with his right hand he pulled it from his pocket, with his left he caught the ferryman by the shoulder, and swung him round.

"What do you want now?" Fresnel demanded, angrily. "Haven't I told you that I . . ."

He broke off short. The nozzle of the pistol was within a foot of his eyes.

"I want the key of the boat. That is all, Fresnel. And

you can either give it me at once, or I'll take it after I have burnt your brains. I should regret to kill you, but I shall not hesitate. It is your life against mine, Fresnel, and you'll not find it strange that if one of us must die I prefer it shall be you."

Fresnel dipped a hand into his pocket and fetched thence a key. He held it out to André-Louis in fingers that shook—more in anger than in fear.

"I yield to violence," he said, showing his teeth like a snarling dog. "But don't imagine that it will greatly profit you."

André-Louis took the key. His pistol remained levelled.

"You threaten me, I think," he said. "It is not difficult to read your threat. The moment I am gone, you will run to inform against me. You will set the *maréchaussée* on my heels to overtake me."

"No, no!" cried the other. He perceived his peril. He read his doom in the cold, sinister note on which André-Louis addressed him, and grew afraid. "I swear to you, *monsieur*, that I have no such intention."

"I think I had better make quite sure of you."

"Oh, my God! Have mercy, *monsieur*!" The knave was in a palsy of terror. "I mean you no harm—I swear to Heaven I mean you no harm. I will not say a word. I will not . . ."

"I would rather depend upon your silence than your assurances. Still, you shall have your chance. I am a fool, perhaps, but I have a reluctance to shed blood. Go into the house, Fresnel. Go, man. I follow you."

In the shabby main room of that dwelling, André-Louis halted him again. "Get me a length of rope," he commanded and was readily obeyed.

Five minutes later Fresnel was securely bound to a chair, and effectively silenced by a very uncomfortable gag improvised out of a block of wood and a muffler.

On the threshold the departing André-Louis turned.

"Good-night, Fresnel," he said. Fierce eyes glared mute hatred at him. "It is unlikely that your ferry will be required again to-night. But someone is sure to come to your relief quite early in the morning. Until then bear your discomfort with what fortitude you can, remembering that you have brought it entirely upon yourself by your uncharitableness. If you spend the night considering that the lesson should not be lost upon you. By morning you may even have grown so charitable as not to know who it was that tied you up. Good-night."

He stepped out and closed the door.

To unlock the ferry and pull himself across the swift running waters, on which the faint moonlight was making a silver ripple, were matters that engaged not more than six or seven minutes. He drove the nose of the boat through the decaying sedges that fringed the southern bank of the stream, sprang ashore, and made the little craft secure. Then, missing the footpath in the dark, he struck out across the sodden meadow in quest of the road.

BOOK II

THE BUSKIN

CHAPTER I

THE TRESPASSERS

COMING presently upon the Rédon road, André-Louis, obeying instinct rather than reason, turned his face to the south and plodded wearily and mechanically forward. He had no clear idea of whither he was going or of whither he should go. All that imported at the moment was to put as great a distance as possible between Gavrillac and himself.

He had a vague, half-formed notion of returning to Nantes ; and there, by employing the newly-found weapon of his oratory, excite the people into sheltering him as the first victim of the persecution he had foreseen, and against which he had sworn them to take up arms. But the idea was one which he entertained merely as an indefinite possibility upon which he felt no real impulse to act.

Meanwhile he chuckled at the thought of Fresnel as he had last seen him, with his muffled face and glaring eyeballs. "For one who was anything but a man of action," he writes, "I felt that I had acquitted myself none too badly." It is a phrase that recurs at intervals in his sketchy *Confessions*. Constantly is he reminding you that he is a man of mental and not physical activities, and apologising when dire necessity drives him into acts of violence. I suspect this insistence upon his philosophic detachment—for which I confess he had justification enough—to betray his besetting vanity

With increasing fatigue came depression and self-criticism. He had stupidly overshot his mark in insultingly denouncing

M. de Lesdiguières. "It is much better," he says somewhere, "to be wicked than to be stupid. Most of this world's misery is the fruit, not as priests tell us, of wickedness, but of stupidity." And we know that of all stupidities he considered anger the most deplorable. Yet he had permitted himself to be angry with a creature like M. de Lesdiguières—a lackey, a fribble a nothing, despite his potentialities for evil. He could perfectly have discharged his self-imposed mission without arousing the vindictive resentment of the King's Lieutenant.

He beheld himself vaguely launched upon life with the riding-suit in which he stood, a single louis d'or and a few pieces of silver for all capital, and a knowledge of law which had been inadequate to preserve him from the consequences of infringing it.

He had, in addition—but these things that were to be the real salvation of him he did not reckon—his gift of laughter, sadly repressed of late, and the philosophic outlook and mercurial temperament which are the stock-in-trade of your adventurer in all ages.

Meanwhile he tramped mechanically on through the night until he felt that he could tramp no more. He had skirted the little township of Guichen, and now within a half-mile of Guignen, and with Gavrillac a good seven miles behind him. his legs refused to carry him any further.

He was midway across the vast common to the north of Guignen when he came to a halt. He had left the road, and taken heedlessly to the footpath that struck across the waste of indifferent pasture interspersed with clumps of gorse. A stone's throw away on his right the common was bordered by a thorn hedge. Beyond this loomed a tall building which he knew to be an open barn, standing on the edge of a long stretch of meadowland. That dark, silent shadow it may have been that had brought him to a standstill, suggesting shelter to his subconsciousness. A moment he hesitated; then he struck across towards the spot where a gap in the hedge was closed by a five-barred gate. He pushed the gate open, went through the gap, and stood now before the barn. It was as big as a house, yet consisted of no more than a roof carried upon half a dozen tall brick pillars. But densely packed under that roof was a great stack of hay that promised a warm couch or so cold a night. Stout timbers had been built into the brick pillars, with projecting ends to serve as ladders by which the labourer might climb to pack or withdraw hay. With what little strength remained him, André-Louis climbed by one of these and landed safely at the top, where he was forced to kneel for lack of room to stand upright. Arrived there, he removed his coat and neck-

cloth, his sodden boots and stockings. Next he cleared a trough for his body, and, lying down in it, covered himself to the neck with the hay he had removed. Within five minutes he was lost to all worldly cares and soundly asleep.

When next he awakened, the sun was already high in the heavens, from which he concluded that the morning was well advanced: and this before he realised quite where he was or how he came there. Then to his awakening senses came a drone of voices close at hand, to which at first he paid little heed. He was deliciously refreshed, luxuriously drowsy and luxuriously warm.

But as consciousness and memory grew more full, he raised his head clear of the hay that he might free both ears to listen, his pulses faintly quickened by the nascent fear that those voices might bode him no good. Then he caught the reassuring accents of a woman, musical and silvery, though laden with alarm.

"Ah, mon Dieu, Léandre, let us separate at once. If it should be my father . . ."

And upon this a man's voice broke in, calm and reassuring:

"No, no, Climène, you are mistaken. There is no one coming. We are quite safe. Why do you start at shadows?"

"Ah, Léandre, if he should find us here together! I tremble at the very thought."

More was not needed to reassure André-Louis. He had overheard enough to know that this was but the case of a pair of lovers who, with less to fear of life, were yet—after the manner of their kind—more timid of heart than he. Curiosity drew him from his warm trough to the edge of the hay. Lying prone, he advanced his head and peered down.

In the space of cropped meadow between the barn and the hedge stood a man and a woman, both young. The man was a well-set-up, comely fellow, with a fine head of chestnut hair tied in a queue by a broad bow of black satin. He was dressed with certain tawdry attempts at ostentatious embellishments, which did not prepossess one at first glance in his favour. His coat of a fashionable cut was of faded plum-coloured velvet edged with silver lace, whose glory had long since departed. He affected ruffles, but for want of starch they hung like weeping willows over hands that were fine and delicate. His breeches were of plain black cloth, and his black stockings were of cotton—matters entirely out of harmony with his magnificent coat. His shoes, stout and serviceable, were decked with buckles of cheap, lack-lustre paste. But for his engaging and ingenuous countenance, André-Louis must have set him down as a knight of that order which lives dishonestly by its wits. As it was, he

suspended judgment whilst pushing investigation further by a study of the girl. At the outset, be it confessed that it was a study that attracted him prodigiously. And this notwithstanding the fact that, bookish and studious as were his ways, and in despite of his years, it was far from his habit to waste consideration on femininity.

The child—she was no more than that, perhaps twenty at the most—possessed in addition to the allurements of face and shape that went very near perfection, a sparkling vivacity and a grace of movement the like of which André-Louis did not remember ever before to have beheld assembled in one person. And her voice too—that musical, silvery voice that had awakened him, possessed in its exquisite modulations an allurements of its own that must have been irresistible, he thought, in the ugliest of her sex. She wore a hooded mantle of green cloth, and the hood being thrown back, her dainty head was all revealed to him. There were glints of gold struck by the morning sun from her light nut-brown hair, that hung in a cluster of curls about her oval face. Her complexion was of a delicacy that he could compare only with a rose petal. He could not at that distance discern the colour of her eyes, but he guessed them blue, as he admired the sparkle of them under the fine, dark line of eyebrows.

He could not have told you why, but he was conscious that it aggrieved him to find her so intimate with this pretty young fellow, who was partly clad, as it appeared, in the cast-offs of a nobleman. He could not guess her station, but the speech that reached him was cultured in tone and word. He strained to listen.

"I shall know no peace, Léandre, until we are safely wedded," she was saying. "Not until then shall I count myself beyond his reach. And yet if we marry without his consent, we but make trouble for ourselves, and of gaining his consent I almost despair."

Evidently, thought André-Louis, her father was a man of sense, who saw through the shabby finery of Monsieur Léandre, and was not to be dazzled by cheap paste buckles.

"My dear Climène," the young man was answering her, standing squarely before her, and holding both her hands, "you are wrong to despond. If I do not reveal to you all the stratagem that I have prepared to win the consent of your unnatural parent, it is because I am loth to rob you of the pleasure of the surprise that is in store. But place your faith in me, and in that ingenious friend of whom I have spoken, and who should be here at any moment."

The stilted ass! Had he learnt that speech by heart in advance or was he by nature a pedantic idiot who expressed himself in this set and formal manner? How came so sweet a blossom to waste her perfumes on such a prig? And what a ridiculous name the creature owned!

Thus André-Louis to himself from his observatory. Meanwhile, she was speaking.

"That is what my heart desires, Léandre, but I am beset by fears lest your stratagem should be too late. I am to marry this horrible Marquis of Sbrufadelli this very day. He arrives by noon. He comes to sign the contract—to make me the Marchioness of Sbrufadelli. Oh!" It was a cry of pain from that tender young heart. "The very name burns my lips. If it were mine I could never utter it—never! The man is so detestable. Save me, Léandre! Save me! You are my only hope."

André-Louis was conscious of a pang of disappointment. She failed to soar to the heights he had expected of her. She was evidently infected by the stilted manner of her ridiculous lover. There was an atrocious lack of sincerity about her words. They touched his mind, but left his heart unmoved. Perhaps this was because of his antipathy to Monsieur Léandre and to the issue involved.

So her father was marrying her to a marquis! That implied birth on her side. And yet she was content to pair off with this dull young adventurer in the tarnished lace! It was, he supposed, the sort of thing to be expected of a sex that all philosophy had taught him to regard as the maddest part of a mad species.

"It shall never be!" Monsieur Léandre was storming passionately. "Never! I swear it!" He shook his puny fist at the blue vault of heaven—Ajax defying Jupiter. "Ah but here comes our subtle friend . . ." (André-Louis did not catch the name, Monsieur Léandre having at that moment turned to face the gap in the hedge) "He will bring us news I know."

André-Louis looked also in the direction of the gap. Through it emerged a lean, slight man in a rusty cloak and a three-cornered hat worn well down over his nose so as to shade his face. And when presently he doffed this hat, and made a sweeping bow to the young lovers, André-Louis confessed to himself that had he been cursed with such a hang-dog countenance he would have worn his hat in precisely such a manner, so as to conceal as much of it as possible. If Monsieur Léandre appeared to be wearing, in part at least, the cast-offs of a nobleman, the newcomer appeared to be wearing the cast-offs of

Monsieur Léandre. Yet, despite his vile clothes and viler face, with its three days' growth of beard, the fellow carried himself with a certain air; he positively strutted as he advanced and he made a leg in a manner that was courtly and practised.

"Monsieur," said he, with the air of a conspirator, "the time for action has arrived, and so has the Marquis. That is why."

The young lovers sprang apart in consternation; Climène with clasped hands, parted lips and a bosom that raced distractingly under its white fichu-menteur; Monsieur Léandre agape, the very picture of foolishness and dismay.

Meanwhile the newcomer rattled on. "I was at the inn an hour ago when he descended there, and I studied him attentively whilst he was at breakfast. Having done so, not a single doubt remains me of our success. As for what he looks like, I could entertain you at length upon the fashion in which Nature has designed his gross fatuity. But that is no matter. We are concerned with what he is, with the wit of him. And I tell you confidently that I find him so dull and stupid that you may be sure he will tumble headlong into each and all of the traps I have so cunningly prepared for him."

"Tell me, tell me! Speak!" Climène implored him, holding out her hands in a supplication no man of sensibility could have resisted. And then on the instant she caught her breath on a faint scream. "My father!" she exclaimed, turning distractedly from one to the other of those two. "He is coming! We are lost!"

"You must fly, Climène!" said Monsieur Léandre.

"Too late!" she sobbed. "Too late! He is here."

"Calm, mademoiselle, calm!" the subtle friend was urging her. "Keep calm and trust to me. I promise you that all shall be well."

"Oh!" cried Monsieur Léandre limply. "Say what you will, my friend, this is ruin—the end of all our hopes. Your wits will never extricate us from this. Never!"

Through the gap strode now an enormous man with an inflamed moon face and a great nose, decently dressed after the fashion of a solid bourgeois. There was no mistaking his anger, but the expression that it found was an amazement to André-Louis.

"Léandre, you're an imbecile! Too much phlegm, too much phlegm! Your words wouldn't convince a ploughboy! Have you considered what they mean at all? Thus," he cried, and casting his round hat from him in a broad gesture, he took his stand at Monsieur Léandre's side, and repeated the

very words that Léandre had lately uttered, what time the three observed him coolly and attentively.

"Oh, say what you will, my friend, this is ruin—the end of all our hopes. Your wits will never extricate us from this. Never!"

A frenzy of despair vibrated in his accents. He swung again to face Monsieur Léandre. "Thus," he bade him contemptuously. "Let the passion of your hopelessness express itself in your voice. Consider that you are not asking Scaramouche here whether he has put a patch in your breeches. You are a despairing lover expressing . . ."

He checked abruptly, startled. André-Louis, suddenly realising what was afoot, and how duped he had been, had loosed his laughter. The sound of it pealing and booming uncannily under the great roof that so immediately confined him was startling to those below.

The fat man was the first to recover, and he announced it after his own fashion in one of the ready sarcasms in which he habitually dealt.

"Hark!" he cried, "the very gods laugh at you, Léandre." Then he addressed the roof of the barn and its invisible tenant. "Hi! You there!"

André-Louis revealed himself by a further protrusion of his touzled head.

"Good-morning," said he pleasantly. Rising now on his knees, his horizon was suddenly extended to include the broad common beyond the hedge. He beheld there an enormous and very battered travelling chaise, a cart piled up with timbers partly visible under the sheet of oiled canvas that covered them, and a sort of house on wheels equipped with a tin chimney from which the smoke was slowly curling. Three heavy Flemish horses and a couple of donkeys—all of them hobbled—were contentedly cropping the grass in the neighbourhood of these vehicles. These, had he perceived them sooner, must have given him the clue to the queer scene that had been played under his eyes. Beyond the hedge, other figures were moving. Three at that moment came crowding into the gap—a saucy-faced girl with a tip-tilted nose, whom he supposed to be Columbine, the soubrette; a lean, active youngster, who must be the lackey Harlequin; and another rather loutish youth who might be a zany or an apothecary.

All this he took in at a comprehensive glance that consumed no more time than it had taken him to say good-morning. To that good-morning Pantaloon replied in a bellow:

"What the devil are you doing up there?"

"Precisely the same thing that you are doing down there," was the answer. "I am trespassing."

"Eh!" said Pantaloon, and looked at his companions, some of the assurance beaten out of his big red face. Although the thing was one that they did habitually, to hear it called by its proper name was disconcerting.

"Whose land is this?" he asked, with diminishing assurance.

André-Louis answered whilst drawing on his stockings. "I believe it to be the property of the Marquis de La Tour d'Azyr."

"That's a high-sounding name. Is the gentleman severe?"

"The gentleman," said André-Louis, "is the devil; or, rather, I should prefer to say, upon reflection, that the devil is a gentleman by comparison."

"And yet," interposed the villainous-looking fellow who played Scaramouche, "by your own confessing you don't hesitate, yourself, to trespass upon his property."

"Ah, but then, you see, I am a lawyer. And lawyers are notoriously unable to observe the law, just as actors are notoriously unable to act. Moreover, sir, Nature imposes her limits upon us; and Nature conquers respect for law as she conquers all else. Nature conquered me last night when I had got as far as this. And so I slept here without regard for the very high and puissant Marquis de La Tour d'Azyr. At the same time, Monsieur Scaramouche, you'll observe that I did not flaunt my trespass quite as openly as you and your companions."

Having donned his boots, André-Louis came nimbly to the ground in his shirt-sleeves, his riding-coat over his arm. As he stood there to don it, the little cunning eyes of the heavy father conned him in detail. Observing that his clothes, if plain, were of a good fashion, that his shirt was of fine cambric, and that he expressed himself like a man of culture, such as he claimed to be, Monsieur Pantaloon was disposed to be civil.

"I am very grateful to you for the warning, sir," he was beginning.

"Act upon it, my friend. The gardes champêtres of Monsieur d'Azyr have orders to fire on trespassers. Imitate me, and decamp."

They followed him upon the instant through that gap in the hedge to the encampment on the common. There André-Louis took his leave of them. But as he was turning away, he perceived a young man of the company performing his morning

toilet at a bucket placed upon one of the wooden steps at the tail of the house on wheels. A moment he hesitated, then he turned frankly to Monsieur Pantaloon, who was still at his elbow.

"If it were not unconscionable to encroach so far upon your hospitality, monsieur," said he, "I would beg leave to imitate that very excellent young gentleman before I leave you."

"But, my dear sir!" Good-nature oozed out of every pore of the fat body of the master-player. "It is nothing at all. But, by all means. Rhodomont will provide what you require. He is the dandy of the company in real life, though a fire-eater on the stage. Hi, Rhodomont!"

The young ablutionist straightened his long body from the right angle in which it had been bent over the bucket, and looked out through a foam of soap-suds. Pantaloon issued an order, and Rhodomont who was indeed as gentle and amiable off the stage as he was formidable and terrible upon it, made the stranger free of the bucket in the friendliest manner.

So André-Louis once more removed his neckcloth and his coat, and rolled up the sleeves of his fine shirt, whilst Rhodomont procured him soap, a towel, and presently a broken comb, and even a greasy hair-ribbon, in case the gentleman should have lost his own. This last André-Louis declined, but the comb he gratefully accepted, and having presently washed himself clean, stood, with the towel flung over his left shoulder, restoring order to his dishevelled locks before a broken piece of mirror affixed to the door of the travelling house.

He was standing thus, what time the gentle Rhodomont babbled aimlessly at his side, when his ears caught the sound of hooves. He looked over his shoulder carelessly, and then stood frozen, with uplifted comb and loosened mouth. Away across the common, on the road that bordered it, he beheld a party of seven horsemen in the blue coats with red facings of the *maréchaussée*.

Not for a moment did he doubt what was the quarry of this prowling gendarmerie. It was as if the chill shadow of the gallows had fallen suddenly upon him.

And then the troop halted, abreast with them, and the sergeant leading it sent his bawling voice across the common.

"Hi, there! Hi!" His tone rang with menace.

Every member of the company—and there were some twelve in all—stood at gaze. Pantaloon advanced a step or two, stalking, his head thrown back, his manner that of a King's Lieutenant.

"Now what the devil's this?" quoth he, but whether of

Fate or Heaven or the sergeant was not clear. Then, raising his voice to shout, he asked again: "What is it?"

There was a brief colloquy among the horsemen, then they came trotting across the common straight towards the players' encampment.

André-Louis still remained standing at the tail of the travelling house. He was still passing the comb through his straggling hair, but mechanically and unconsciously. His mind was all intent upon the advancing troop, his wits alert and gathered together for a leap in whatever direction should be indicated.

Still in the distance, but evidently impatient, the sergeant bawled a question.

"Who gave you leave to encamp here?"

It was a question that reassured André-Louis not at all. He was not deceived by it into supposing, or even hoping, that the business of these men was merely to round up vagrants and trespassers. That was no part of their real duty; it was something done in passing—done, perhaps, in the hope of levying a tax of their own. It was very long odds that they were from Rennes, and that their real business was the hunting down of a young lawyer charged with sedition. Meanwhile Pantaloon was shouting back:

"Who gave us leave, do you say? What leave? This is communal land, free to all."

The sergeant laughed unpleasantly, and came on his troop following.

"There is," said a voice at Pantaloon's elbow, "no such thing as communal land in the proper sense in all Monsieur de La Tour d'Azyr's vast domain. This is a terre censive, and his bailiffs collect his dues from all who send their beasts to graze here."

Pantaloon turned to behold at his side André-Louis in his shirt-sleeves, and without a neckcloth, the towel still trailing over his left shoulder, a comb in his hand, his hair half dressed.

"God of God!" swore Pantaloon, "but it is an ogre, this Marquis de La Tour d'Azyr."

"I have told you already what I think of him," said André-Louis. "As for these fellows, you had better let me deal with them. I have experience of their kind." And without waiting for Pantaloon's consent, André-Louis stepped forward to meet the advancing men of the *maréchaussée*. He had realised that here boldness alone could save him.

When a moment later the sergeant pulled up his horse alongside of this half-dressed young man, André-Louis combed

his hair what time he looked up with a half-smile, intended to be ingenuous, friendly and disarming.

In spite of it the sergeant hailed him gruffly

"Are you the leader of this troupe of vagabonds?"

"Yes . . . that is to say my father, there, is really the leader." And he jerked a thumb in the direction of Monsieur Pantaloon, who stood at gaze, out of earshot, in the background.

"What is your pleasure, captain?"

"My pleasure is to tell you that you are very likely to be gaoled for this, all the pack of you." His voice was loud and bullying. It carried across the common to the ears of every member of the company, and brought them all to stricken attention where they stood. The lot of strolling players was hard enough without the addition of gaolings.

"But how so, my captain? This is communal land—free to all."

"It is nothing of the kind."

"Where are the fences?" quoth André-Louis, waving the hand that held the comb, as if to indicate the openness of the place.

"Fences!" snorted the sergeant. "What have fences to do with the matter? This is terre censive. There is no grazing here save by payment of dues to the Marquis de La Tour d'Azyr."

"But we are not grazing," quoth the innocent André-Louis.

"To the devil with you, zany! You are not grazing! But your beasts are grazing!"

"They eat so little," André-Louis apologised, and again essayed his ingratiating smile.

The sergeant grew more terrible than ever. "That is not the point. The point is that you are committing what amounts to a theft, and there's the gaol for thieves."

"Technically, I suppose you are right," sighed André-Louis, and fell to combing his hair again, still looking up into the sergeant's face. "But we have sinned in ignorance. We are grateful to you for the warning." He passed the comb into his left hand, and with his right fumbled in his breeches' pocket, whence there came a faint jingle of coins. "We are desolated to have brought you out of your way. Perhaps for their trouble your men would honour us by stopping at the next inn to drink the health of . . . of . . . this Monsieur de La Tour d'Azyr, or any other health that they think proper."

Some of the clouds lifted from the sergeant's brow. But not yet all.

"Well, well," said he, gruffly. "But you must decamp,

you understand." He leaned from the saddle to bring his recipient hand to a convenient distance. André-Louis placed in it a three-livre piece.

"In half an hour," said André-Louis.

"Why in half an hour? Why not at once?"

"Oh, but time to break our fast."

They looked at each other. The sergeant next considered the broad piece of silver in his palm. Then at last his features relaxed from their sternness.

"After all," said he, "it is none of our business to play the tipstaves for Monsieur de La Tour d'Azyr. We are of the *maréchaussée* from Rennes." André-Louis's eyelids played him false by flickering. "But if you linger, look out for the *gardes champêtres* of the Marquis. You'll find them not at all accommodating. Well, well—a good appetite to you, monsieur," said he in valediction.

"A pleasant ride, my captain," answered André-Louis.

The sergeant wheeled his horse about, his troop wheeled with him. They were starting off, when he reined up again.

"You, monsieur!" he called over his shoulder. In a bound André-Louis was beside his stirrup. "We are in quest of a scoundrel named André-Louis Moreau, from Gavrilac, a fugitive from justice wanted for the gallows on a matter of sedition. You've seen nothing, I suppose, of a man whose movements seemed to you suspicious?"

"Indeed we have," said André-Louis, very boldly, his face eager with consciousness of the ability to oblige.

"You have?" cried the sergeant, in a ringing voice. "Where? When?"

"Yesterday evening in the neighbourhood of Guignen . . ."

"Yes, yes!" the sergeant felt himself hot upon the trail.

"There was a fellow who seemed very fearful of being, recognised . . . a man of fifty or thereabouts . . ."

"Fifty!" cried the sergeant, and his face fell. "Bah! This man of ours is no older than yourself, a thin wisp of a fellow of about your own height and of black hair, just like your own by the description. Keep a look-out on your travels, master player. The King's Lieutenant in Rennes has sent us word this morning that he will pay ten louis to anyone giving information that will lead to this scoundrel's arrest. So there's ten louis to be earned by keeping your eye open and sending word to the nearest justices. It would be a fine windfall for you, that."

"A fine windfall indeed, captain," answered André-Louis, laughing. But the sergeant had touched his horse with the

spur, and was already trotting off in the wake of his men. André-Louis continued to laugh, quite silently, as he sometimes did when the humour of a jest was peculiarly keen.

Then he turned slowly about, and came back towards Pantaloon and the rest of the company, who were now all grouped together, at gaze.

Pantaloon advanced to meet him with both hands outheld. For a moment André-Louis thought he was about to be embraced.

"We hail you our saviour!" the big man declaimed. "Already the shadow of the gaol was creeping over us, chilling us to the very marrow. For though we be poor, yet are we all honest folk and not one of us has ever suffered the indignity of prison. Nor is there one of us would survive it. But for you, my friend, it might have happened. What magic did you work?"

"The magic that is to be worked in France with a King's portrait. The French are a very loyal nation, as you will have observed. They love their King—and his portrait even better than himself, especially when it is wrought in gold. But even in silver it is respected. The sergeant was so overcome by the sight of that noble visage—on a three-livre piece—that his anger vanished, and he has gone his ways leaving us to depart in peace."

"Ah, true! He said we must decamp. About it, my lads! Come, come . . ."

"But not until after breakfast," said André-Louis. "A half-hour for breakfast was conceded us by that loyal fellow, so deeply was he touched. True, he spoke of possible gardes champêtres. But he knows as well as I do that they are not seriously to be feared, and that if they came, again the King's portrait—wrought in copper this time—would produce the same melting effect upon them. So, my dear Monsieur Pantaloon, break your fast at your ease. I can smell your cooking from here, and from the smell I argue that there is no need to wish you a good appetite."

"My friend, my saviour!" Pantaloon flung a great arm about the young man's shoulders. "You shall stay to breakfast with us."

"I confess to a hope that you would ask me," said André-Louis.

CHAPTER II

THE SERVICE OF THESPII

THEY were, thought André-Louis, as he sat down to breakfast with them, behind the itinerant house, in the bright sunshine that tempered the cold breath of that November morning, on odd and yet an attractive crew. An air of gaiety pervaded them. They affected to have no cares, and made merry over the trials and tribulations of their nomadic life. They were curiously, yet amiably, artificial; histrionic in their manner of discharging the most commonplace of functions; exaggerated in their gestures; stilted and affected in their speech. They seemed indeed to belong to a world apart, a world of unreality which became real only on the planks of their stage, in the glare of their footlights. Good-fellowship bound them one to another; and André-Louis reflected cynically that this harmony amongst them might be the cause of their apparent unreality. In the real world, greedy striving and the emulation of acquisitiveness preclude such amity as was present here.

They numbered exactly eleven, three women and eight men; and they addressed each other by their stage names; names which denoted their several types, and never—or only very slightly—varied, no matter what might be the play that they performed.

"We are," Pantaloon informed him, "one of those few remaining staunch bands of real players, who uphold the traditions of the old Italian *Commedia dell'Arte*. Not for us to vex our memories and stultify our wit with the stilted phrases that are the fruit of a wretched author's lucubrations. Each of us is in detail his own author in a measure as he develops the part assigned to him. We are improvisers—improvisers of the old and noble Italian school."

"I had guessed as much," said André-Louis, "when I discovered you rehearsing your improvisations."

Pantaloon frowned.

"I have observed, young sir, that your humour inclines to the pungent, not to say the acrid. It is very well. It is, I suppose, the humour that should go with such a countenance. But it may lead you astray, as in this instance. That rehearsal—a most unusual thing with us—was necessitated by the histrionic rawness of our Léandre. We are seeking to inculcate into him by training an art with which Nature neglected to endow

him against his present needs. Should he continue to fail in doing justice to our schooling. . . . But we will not disturb our present harmony with the unpleasant anticipation of misfortunes which we still hope to avert. We love our Léandre, for all his faults. Let me make you acquainted with our company."

And he proceeded to introduction in detail. He pointed out the long and amiable Rhodomont, whom André-Louis already knew.

"His length of limb and hooked nose were his superficial qualifications to play roaring captains," Pantaloon explained. "His lungs have justified our choice. You should hear him roar. At first we called him Spavento or Epouvante. But that was unworthy of so great an artist. Not since the superb Mondor amazed the world has so thrasonical a bully been seen upon the stage. So we conferred upon him the name of Rhodomont that Mondor made famous; and I give you my word, as an actor and a gentleman—for I am a gentleman, monsieur, or was—that he has justified us."

His little eyes beamed in his great swollen face as he turned their gaze upon the object of his encomium. The terrible Rhodomont, confused by so much praise, blushed like a school-girl as he met the solemn scrutiny of André-Louis.

"Then here we have Scaramouche, whom also you already know. Sometimes he is Scapin and sometimes Coviello, but in the main Scaramouche, to which, let me tell you, he is best suited—sometimes too well suited, I think. For he is Scaramouche not only on the stage, but also in the world. He has a gift of sly intrigue, an art of setting folk by the ears, combined with an impudent aggressiveness upon occasion when he considers himself safe from reprisals. He is Scaramouche, the little skirmisher, to the very life. I could say more. But I am by disposition charitable, and loving to all mankind."

"As the priest said when he kissed the serving-wench," snarled Scaramouche, and went on eating.

"His humour, like your own, you will observe is acrid," said Pantaloon. He passed on. "Then that rascal with the lumpy nose and the grinning bucolic countenance is, of course, Pierrot. Could he be aught else?"

"I could play lovers a deal better," said the rustic cherub.

"That is the delusion proper to Pierrot," said Pantaloon, contemptuously. "This heavy, beetle-browed ruffian, who has grown old in sin, and whose appetite increases with his years, is Polichinelle. Each one, as you perceive, is designed by Nature for the part he plays. This nimble, freckled jackanapes

is Harlequin ; not your spangled Harlequin into which modern degeneracy has debased that first-born of Momus, but the genuine original zany of the Commedia, ragged and patched, an impudent, cowardly, blackguardly clown."

"Each one of us, as you perceive," said Harlequin, mimicking the leader of the troupe, "is designed by Nature for the part he plays."

"Physically, my friend—physically only, else we should not have so much trouble in teaching this beautiful Léandre to become a lover. Then we have Pasquariel here, who is sometimes an apothecary, sometimes a notary, sometimes a lackey—an amiable, accommodating fellow. He is also an excellent cook, being a child of Italy, that land of gluttons. And, finally, you have myself, who as the father of the company very properly play, as Pantaloon, the rôles of father. Sometimes, it is true, I am a deluded husband, and sometimes an ignorant, self-sufficient doctor. But it is rarely that I find it necessary to call myself other than Pantaloon. For the rest, I am the only one who has a name—a real name. It is Binet, monsieur.

"And now for the ladies. First in order of seniority we have Madame there." He waved one of his great hands towards a buxom, smiling blonde of five-and-forty, who was seated on the lowest step of the travelling house. "She is our Duègne, or Mother, or Nurse, as the case requires. She is known quite simply and royally as Madame. If she ever had a name in the world, she has long since forgotten it, which is perhaps as well. Then we have this pert jade with the tip-tilted nose and the wide mouth, who is, of course, our soubrette Columbine, and lastly, my daughter, Climène, an amoureuse of talents not to be matched outside of the Comédie Française, of which she has the bad taste to aspire to become a member."

The lovely Climène—and lovely indeed she was—tossed her nut-brown curls and laughed as she looked across at André-Louis. Her eyes, he had perceived by now, were not blue but hazel.

"Do not believe him, monsieur. Here I am queen, and I prefer to be queen here rather than a slave in Paris."

"Mademoiselle," said André-Louis, quite solemnly, "will be queen wherever she condescends to reign."

Her only answer was a timid—timid and yet alluring—glance from under fluttering lids. Meanwhile her father was bawling at the comely young man who played lovers :

"You hear. Léandre ! That is the sort of speech you should practice."

Léandre raised languid eyebrows. "That?" quoth he, and shrugged. "The merest commonplace."

André-Louis laughed approval. "Monsieur Léandre is of a readier wit than you concede. There is subtlety in pronouncing it a commonplace to call Mademoiselle Climène a queen."

Some laughed, Monsieur Binet amongst them, with good-humoured mockery.

"You think he has the wit to mean it thus? Bah His subtleties are all unconscious."

The conversation becoming general, André-Louis soon learnt what yet there was to learn of this strolling band. They were on their way to Guichen, where they hoped to prosper at the fair that was to open on Monday next. They would make their triumphal entry into the town at noon, and setting up their stage in the old market, they would give their first performance that same Saturday night, in a new canevas—or scenario—of Monsieur Binet's own, which should set the rustics gaping. And then Monsieur Binet fetched a sigh, and addressed himself to the elderly, swarthy, beetle-browed Polichinelle, who sat on his left.

"But we shall miss Félicien," said he. "Indeed, I do not know what we shall do without him."

"Oh, we shall contrive," said Polichinelle, with his mouth full.

"So you always say, whatever happens, knowing that in any case the contriving will not fall upon yourself."

"He would not be difficult to replace," said Harlequin.

"True, if we were in a civilised land. But where among the rustics of Brittany are we to find a fellow of even his poor parts?" Monsieur Binet turned to André-Louis. "He was our property-man, our machinist, our stage-carpenter, our man of affairs, and occasionally he acted."

"The part of Figaro, I presume," said André-Louis, which elicited a laugh.

"So you are acquainted with Beaumarchais!" Binet eyed the young man with fresh interest.

"He is tolerably well known, I think."

"In Paris, to be sure. But I had not dreamt his fame had reached the wilds of Brittany."

"But then I was some years in Paris—at the Lycée of Louis le Grand. It was there I made acquaintance with his work."

"A dangerous man," said Polichinelle, sententiously.

"Indeed, and you are right," Pantaloon agreed. "Clever—I do not deny him that, although myself I find little use

for authors. But of a sinister cleverness responsible for the dissemination of many of these subversive new ideas. I think such writers should be suppressed."

"Monsieur de La Tour d'Azyr would probably agree with you—the gentleman who by the simple exertion of his will turns this communal land into his own property." And André-Louis drained his cup, which had been filled with the poor *vini gris* that was the players' drink.

It was a remark that might have precipitated an argument, had it not also reminded Monsieur Binet of the terms on which they were encamped there, and of the fact that the half-hour was more than past. In a moment he was on his feet, leaping up with an agility surprising in so corpulent a man, issuing his commands like a marshal on a field of battle.

"Come, come, my lads! Are we to sit guzzling here all day? Time flees, and there's a deal to be done if we are to make our entry into Guichen at noon. Go, get you dressed. We strike camp in twenty minutes. Bestir ladies! To your chaise, and see that you contrive to look your best. Soon the eyes of Guichen will be upon you, and the condition of your interior to-morrow will depend upon the impression made by your exterior to-day. Away! Away!"

The implicit obedience this autocrat commanded set them in a whirl. Baskets and boxes were dragged forth to receive the platters and remains of their meagre feast. In an instant the ground was cleared, and the three ladies had taken their departure to the chaise, which was set apart for their use. The men were already climbing into the house on wheels when Binet turned to André-Louis.

"We part here, sir," said he, dramatically, "the richer by your acquaintance; your debtors and your friends." He put forth his podgy hand.

Slowly André-Louis took it in his own. He had been thinking swiftly in the last few moments. And remembering the safety he had found from his pursuers in the bosom of this company, it occurred to him that nowhere could he be better hidden for the present, until the quest for him should have died down.

"Sir," he said, "the indebtedness is on my side. It is not every day one has the felicity to sit down with so illustrious and engaging a company."

Binet's little eyes peered suspiciously at the young man, in quest of irony. He found nothing but candour and simple good faith.

"I part from you reluctantly," André-Louis continued.

"The more reluctantly since I do not perceive the absolute necessity for parting."

"How?" quoth Binet, frowning, and slowly withdrawing the hand which the other had already retained rather longer than was necessary.

"Thus," André-Louis explained himself. "You may set me down as a sort of knight of rueful countenance in quest of adventure, with no fixed purpose in life at present. You will not marvel that what I have seen of yourself and your distinguished troupe should inspire me to desire your better acquaintance. On your side, you tell me that you are in need of someone to replace your Figaro—Félicien, I think you called him. Whilst it may be presumptuous of me to hope that I could discharge an office so varied and so onerous . . ."

"You are indulging that acrid humour of yours again, my friend," Binet interrupted him. "Excepting for that," he added slowly, meditatively, his little eyes screwed up, "we might discuss this proposal that you seem to be making."

"Alas! we can except nothing. If you take me, you take me as I am. What else is possible? As for this humour—such as it is—which you decry, you might turn it to profitable account."

"How so?"

"In several ways. I might, for instance, teach Léandre to make love."

Pantaloon burst into laughter. "You do not lack confidence in your powers. Modesty does not afflict you."

"Therefore I evince the first quality necessary in an actor."

"Can you act?"

"Upon occasion, I think," said André-Louis, his thought upon his performance at Rennes and Nantes, and wondering when in all his histrionic career Pantaloon's improvisations had so rent the heart of mobs.

Monsieur Binet was musing. "Do you know much of the theatre?" quoth he.

"Everything," said André-Louis.

"I said that modesty will prove no obstacle in your career."

"But consider. I know the work of Beaumarchais, Eglantine, Mercier, Chenier, and many other of our contemporaries. Then I have read, of course, Molière, Racine, Corneille, besides many lesser French writers. Of foreign authors, I am intimate with the works of Gozzi, Goldoni, Guarini, Bibbiena, Machiavelli, Secchi, Tasso, Ariosto and Fedini. Whilst of those of antiquity I know most of the work of Euripides, Aristophanes, Terence, Plautus . . ."

"Enough!" roared Pantaloon.

"I am not nearly through with my list," said André-Louis.

"You may keep the rest for another day. In Heaven's name, what can have induced you to read so many dramatic authors?"

"In my humble way I am a student of man, and some years ago I made the discovery that he is most intimately to be studied in the reflections of him provided for the theatre."

"That is a very original and profound discovery," said Pantaloon, quite seriously. "It had never occurred to me. Yet it is true. Sir, it is a truth that dignifies our art. You are a man of parts, that is clear to me. It has been clear since first I met you. I can read a man. I knew you from the moment that you said 'good-morning.' Tell me, now, do you think you could assist me upon occasion in the preparation of a scenario? My mind, fully engaged as it is with a thousand details of organisation, is not always as clear as I would have it for such work. Could you assist me there, do you think?"

"I am quite sure I could."

"Hum, yes. I was sure you would be. The other duties that were Félicien's you would soon learn. Well, well, if you are willing, you may come along with us. You'd want some salary, I suppose?"

"If it is usual," said André-Louis.

"What should you say to ten livres a month?"

"I should say that it isn't exactly the riches of Peru."

"I might go as far as fifteen," said Binet reluctantly. "But times are bad."

"I'll make them better for you."

"I've no doubt you believe it. Then we understand each other?"

"Perfectly," said André-Louis dryly, and was thus committed to the service of Thespis.

CHAPTER III

THE COMIC MUSE

THE company's entrance into the township of Guichen, if not exactly triumphal, as Binet had expressed the desire that it should be, was at least sufficiently startling and cacophonous to set the rustics gaping. To them these fantastic creatures

appeared—as indeed they were—beings from another world.

First went the great travelling chaise, creaking and groaning on its way, drawn by two of the Flemish horses. It was Pantaloon who drove it, an obese and massive Pantaloon in a tight-fitting suit of scarlet under a long brown bedgown, his countenance adorned by a colossal cardboard nose. Beside him on the box sat Pierrot in a white smock, with sleeves that completely covered his hands, loose white trousers and a black skull-cap. He had whitened his face with flour and he made hideous noises with a trumpet.

On the roof of the coach were assembled Polichinelle, Scaramouche, Harlequin and Pasquariel. Polichinelle in black and white, his doublet cut in the fashion of a century ago, with humps before and behind, a white frill round his neck and a black mask upon the upper half of his face, stood in the middle, his feet planted wide to steady him, solemnly and viciously banging a big drum. The other three were seated each at one of the corners of the roof, their legs dangling over. Scaramouche all in black in the Spanish fashion of the seventeenth century, his face adorned with a pair of moustachios, jangled a guitar discordantly. Harlequin, ragged and patched in every colour of the rainbow, with his leather girdle and sword of lath, the upper half of his face smeared in soot, clashed a pair of cymbals intermittently. Pasquariel, as an apothecary in skull-cap and white apron, excited the hilarity of the onlookers by his enormous tin clyster, which emitted when pumped a dolorous squeak.

Within the chaise itself, but showing themselves freely at the windows, and exchanging quips with the townsfolk, sat the three ladies of the company. Climène, the amoureuse, beautifully gowned in flowered satin, her own clustering ringlets, concealed under a pumpkin-shaped wig, looked so much the lady of fashion that you might have wondered what she was doing in that fantastic rabble. Madame, as the mother, was also dressed with splendour, but exaggerated to achieve the ridiculous. Her head-dress was a monstrous structure adorned with flowers, and superimposed by little ostrich plumes. Columbine sat facing them, her back to the horses, falsely demure, in milk-maid bonnet of white muslin and a striped gown of green and blue.

The marvel was that the old chaise, which in its halcyon days may have served to carry some dignitary of the Church, did not founder instead of merely groaning under that excessive and ribald load.

Next came the house on wheels, led by the long, lean Rhodomont, who had daubed his face red, and increased the

terror of it by a pair of formidable moustachios. He was in long thigh-boots and leather baldrick. He wore a broad felt hat with a dragged feather, and as he advanced he raised his great voice and roared out defiance, and threats of blood-curdling butchery to be performed upon all and sundry. On the roof of this vehicle sat Léandre alone. He was in blue satin, with ruffles, small sword, powdered hair, patches and spy-glass, and red-heeled shoes; the complete courtier, looking very handsome. The women of Guichen ogled him coquettishly. He took the ogling as a proper tribute to his personal endowments, and returned it with interest. Like Climène, he looked out of place amid the bandits who composed the remainder of the company.

Bringing up the rear came André-Louis leading the two donkeys that dragged the property-cart. He had insisted upon assuming a false nose, representing as for embellishment that which he intended for disguise. For the rest, he had retained his own garments. No one paid any attention to him as he trudged along beside his donkeys, an insignificant rearguard, which he was well content to be.

They made the tour of the town, in which the activity was already above the normal in preparation for next week's fair. At intervals they halted, the cacophony would cease abruptly, and Polichinelle would announce in a stentorian voice that at five o'clock that evening in the old market Monsieur Binet's famous company of improvisors would perform a new comedy in four acts entitled, 'The Heartless Father.'

Thus at last they came to the old market, which was the ground floor of the town hall, and open to the four winds by two archways on each side of its length and one archway on each side of its breadth. These archways, with two exceptions, had been boarded up. Through those two, which gave admission to what presently would be the theatre, ragamuffins of the town, and the niggards who were reluctant to spend the necessary sous to obtain proper admission might catch furtive glimpses of the performance.

That afternoon was the most strenuous of André-Louis's life, unaccustomed as he was to any sort of manual labour. It was spent in erecting and preparing the stage at the end of the market-hall; and he began to realise how hard-earned were to be his monthly fifteen livres. At first there were four of them to the task—or really three, for Pantaloon did no more than bawl directions. Stripped of their finery, Rhodoment and Léandre assisted André-Louis in that carpentering. Meanwhile the other four were at dinner with the ladies. When

a half-hour or so later they came to carry on the work, André-Louis and his companions went to dine in their turn, leaving Polichinelle to direct the operations as well as assist in them.

They crossed the square to the cheap little inn where they had taken up their quarters. In the narrow passage, André-Louis came face to face with Climène, her fine feathers cast, and restored by now to her normal appearance.

"And how do you like it?" she asked him pertly.

He looked her in the eyes. "It has its compensations," quoth he, in that curious cold tone of his that left one wondering whether he meant or not what he seemed to mean.

She knit her brows. "You . . . you feel the need of compensations already!"

"Faith, I felt it from the beginning," said he. "It was the perception of them allured me."

They were quite alone, the others having gone on into the room set apart for them, where food was spread. André-Louis, who was as unlearned in Woman as he was learned in Man, was not to know, upon feeling himself suddenly extraordinarily aware of her femininity, that it was she who in some subtle, imperceptible manner so rendered him.

"What," she asked him, with demurest innocence, "are these compensations?"

He caught himself upon the brink of the abyss.

"Fifteen livres a month," said he, abruptly.

A moment she stared at him bewildered. He was very disconcerting. Then she recovered.

"Oh, and bed and board," said she. "Don't be leaving that from the reckoning as you seem to be doing; for your dinner will be going cold. Aren't you coming?"

"Haven't you dined?" he cried, and she wondered had she caught a note of eagerness.

"No," she answered over her shoulder. "I waited."

"What for?" quoth his innocence, hopefully.

"I had to change, of course, zany," she answered rudely. Having dragged him, as she imagined, to the chopping-block, she could not refrain from chopping. But then he was of those who must be chopping back.

"And you left your manners upstairs with your grand-lady clothes, mademoiselle. I understand."

A scarlet flame suffused her face. "You are very insolent," she said, lamely.

"I've often been told so. But I don't believe it." He thrust open the door for her, and bowing with an air which imposed upon her, although it was merely copied from Fleury

of the Comédie Française, so often visited in the Louis Le Grand days, he waved her in. "After you, *ma demoiselle*." For greater emphasis he deliberately broke the word into its two component parts.

"I thank you, *monsieur*," she answered, frostily, as nearly sneering as was possible to so charming a person, and went in, nor addressed him again throughout the meal. Instead, she devoted herself with an unusual and devastating assiduity to the suspiring Léandre, that poor devil who could not successfully play the lover with her on the stage because of his longing to play it in reality.

André-Louis ate his herrings and black bread with a good appetite nevertheless. It was poor fare, but then poor fare was the common lot of poor people in that winter of starvation, and since he had cast in his fortunes with a company whose affairs were not flourishing, he must accept the evils of the situation philosophically.

"Have you a name?" Binet asked him once in the course of that repast, and during a pause in the conversation.

"It happens that I have," said he. "I think it is *Parvissimus*."

"*Parvissimus*?" quoth Binet. "Is that a family name?"

"In such a company, where only the leader enjoys the privilege of a family name, the like would be unbecoming in its least member. So I take the name that best becomes me. And I think it is *Parvissimus*—the very least."

Binet was amused. It was droll; it showed a ready fancy. Oh, to be sure, they must get to work together on those scenarios.

"I shall prefer it to carpentering," André-Louis confessed.

Nevertheless, he had to go back to it that afternoon, and to labour strenuously until four o'clock, when at last the autocratic Binet announced himself satisfied with the preparations, and proceeded, again with the help of André-Louis, to prepare the lights, which were supplied partly by tallow candles and partly by lamps burning fish-oil.

At five o'clock that evening the three knocks were sounded and the curtain rose on 'The Heartless Father.'

Among the duties inherited by André-Louis from the departed Félicien whom he replaced was that of doorkeeper. This duty he discharged dressed in a Polichinelle costume and wearing a cardboard nose. It was an arrangement mutually agreeable to M. Binet and himself. M. Binet—who had taken the further precaution of retaining André-Louis's own garments—was thereby protected against the risk of his latest recruit absconding with the takings. André-Louis, without

illusions on the score of Pantaloon's real object, agreed to it willingly enough, since it protected him from the chance of recognition by any acquaintance who might possibly be in Guichen.

The performance was in every sense unexciting ; the audience meagre and unenthusiastic. The benches provided in the front half of the market contained some twenty-seven persons ; eleven at twenty sous a head and sixteen at twelve. Behind these stood a rabble of some thirty others at six sous apiece. Thus the gross takings were two louis, ten livres, and two sous. By the time M. Binet had paid for the use of the market, his lights, and the expenses of his company at the inn over Sunday, there was not likely to be very much left towards the wages of his players. It is not surprising, therefore, that M. Binet's bonhomie should have been a trifle overcast that evening.

"And what do you think of it ?" he asked André-Louis, as they were walking back to the inn after the performance.

"Possibly it could have been worse ; probably it could not," said he.

In sheer amazement, M. Binet checked in his stride and turned to look at his companion.

"Huh !" said he. "Dieu de Dieu ! But you are frank."

"An unpopular form of service among fools, I know."

"Well, I am not a fool," said Binet.

"That is why I am frank. I pay you the compliment of assuming intelligence in you, M. Binet."

"Oh, you do ?" quoth M. Binet. "And who the devil are you to assume anything ? Your assumptions are presumptuous, sir." And with that he lapsed into silence and the gloomy business of mentally casting up his accounts.

But at table over supper a half-hour later he revived the topic.

"Our latest recruit, this excellent M. Parvissimus," he announced, "has the impudence to tell me that possibly our comedy could have been worse, but that probably it could not." And he blew out his great round cheeks to invite a laugh at the expense of that foolish critic.

"That's bad," said the swarthy and sardonic Polichinelle. He was as grave as Rhadamanthus pronouncing judgment. "That's bad. But what is infinitely worse is that the audience had the impudence to be of the same mind."

"An ignorant pack of clods," sneered Léandre, with a toss of his handsome head.

"You are wrong," quoth Harlequin. "You were born for love, my dear, not criticism."

Léandre—a dull dog, as you will have conceived—looked contemptuously down upon the little man. “And you, what were you born for?” he wondered.

“Nobody knows,” was the candid admission. “Nor yet why. It is the case of many of us, my dear, believe me.”

“But why,” M. Binet took him up and thus spoilt the beginnings of a very pretty quarrel. “why do you say that Léandre is wrong?”

“To be general, because he is always wrong. To be particular, because I judge the audience of Guichen to be too sophisticated for ‘The Heartless Father.’”

“You would put it more happily,” interposed André-Louis—who was the cause of this discussion—“if you said that ‘The Heartless Father’ is too unsophisticated for the audience of Guichen.”

“Why, what’s the difference?” asked Léandre.

“I didn’t imply a difference. I merely suggested that it is a happier way to express the fact.”

“The gentleman is being subtle,” sneered Binet.

“Why happier?” Harlequin demanded.

“Because it is easier to bring ‘The Heartless Father’ to the sophistication of the Guichen audience, than the Guichen audience to the unsophistication of ‘The Heartless Father.’”

“Let me think it out,” groaned Polichinelle, and he took his head in his hands.

But from the tail of the table André-Louis was challenged by Climène, who sat there between Columbine and Madame.

“You would alter the comedy, would you, M. Parvissimus?” she cried.

He turned to parry her malice.

“I would suggest that it be altered,” he corrected, inclining his head.

“And how would you alter it, monsieur?”

“I? Oh, for the better.”

“But of course!” She was sleekest sarcasm. “And how would you do it?”

“Ay, tell us that,” roared M. Binet, and added: “Silence, I pray you, gentlemen and ladies. Silence for M. Parvissimus.”

André-Louis looked from father to daughter, and smiled. “Pardi!” said he. “I am between bludgeon and dagger. If I escape with my life, I shall be fortunate. Why, then, since you pin me to the very wall, I’ll tell you what I should do. I should go back to the original and help myself more freely from it.”

“The original?” questioned M. Binet—the author.

"It is called, I believe, 'Monsieur de Pourceaugnac,' and was written by Molière."

Somebody tittered, but that somebody was not M. Binet. He had been touched on the raw, and the look in his little eyes betrayed the fact that his bonhomie exterior covered anything but a bonhomie.

"You charge me with plagiarism," he said at last, "with filching the ideas of Molière?"

"There is always, of course," said André-Louis, unruffled, "the alternative possibility of two great minds working upon parallel lines."

M. Binet studied the young man attentively a moment. He found him bland and inscrutable, and decided to pin him down.

"Then you do not imply that I have been stealing from Molière?"

"I advise you to do so, monsieur," was the disconcerting reply.

M. Binet was shocked.

"You advise me to do so! You advise me, Antoine Binet, to turn thief at my age!"

"He is outrageous," said Mademoiselle indignantly.

"Outrageous is the word. I thank you for it, my dear. I take you on trust, sir. You sit at my table, you have the honour to be included in my company, and to my face you have the audacity to advise me to become a thief—the worst kind of thief that is conceivable, a thief of spiritual things, a thief of ideas! It is insufferable, intolerable! I have been, I fear, deeply mistaken in you, monsieur; just as you appear to have been mistaken in me. I am not the scoundrel you suppose me, sir, and I will not number in my company a man who dares to suggest that I should become one. Outrageous!"

He was very angry. His voice boomed through the little room, and the company sat hushed and something scared, their eyes upon André-Louis, who was the only one entirely unmoved by this outburst of virtuous indignation.

"You realise, monsieur," he said, very quietly, "that you are insulting the memory of the illustrious dead?"

"Eh?" said Binet.

André-Louis developed his sophistries.

"You insult the memory of Molière, the greatest ornament of our stage one of the greatest ornaments of our nation, when you suggest that there is vileness in doing that which he never hesitated to do, which no great author yet has hesitated to do. You cannot suppose that Molière ever troubled himself to be original in the matter of ideas. You cannot suppose that the

stories he tells in his plays have never been told before. They were culled, as you very well know—though you seem momentarily to have forgotten it, and it is therefore necessary that I should remind you—they were culled, many of them, from the Italian authors, who themselves had culled them from Heaven alone knows where. Molière took those old stories and re-told them in his own language. That is precisely what I am suggesting that you should do. Your company is a company of improvisers. You supply the dialogue as you proceed, which is rather more than Molière ever attempted. You may, if you prefer it—though it would seem to me to be yielding to an excess of scruple—go straight to Boccaccio or Sacchetti. But even then you cannot be sure that you have reached the sources."

André-Louis came off with flying colours after that. You see what a debater was lost in him; how nimble he was in the art of making white look black. The company was impressed, and no one more than M. Binet, who found himself supplied with a crushing argument against those who in future might tax him with the impudent plagiarisms which he undoubtedly perpetrated. He retired in the best order he could from the position he had taken up at the outset.

"So that you think," he said, at the end of a long outburst of agreement, "you think that our story of 'The Heartless Father' could be enriched by dipping into 'Monsieur de Pourceaugnac,' to which I confess upon reflection that it may present certain superficial resemblances?"

"I do; most certainly I do—always provided that you do so judiciously. Times have changed since Molière."

It was as a consequence of this that Binet retired soon after taking André-Louis with him. The pair sat together late that night, and were again in close communion throughout the whole of Sunday morning.

After dinner M. Binet read to the assembled company the amended and amplified canevas of 'The Heartless Father,' which, acting upon the advice of M. Parvissimus, he had been at great pains to prepare. The company had few doubts as to the real authorship before he began to read; none at all when he had read. There was a verve, a grip about this story; and, what was more, those of them who knew their Molière realised that far from approaching the original more closely, this canevas had drawn further away from it. Molière's original part—the title-rôle—had dwindled into insignificance, to the great disgust of Polichinelle, to whom it fell. But the other parts had all been built up into importance, with the exception of Léandre, who remained as before. The two great

rôles were now Scaramouche, in the character of the intriguing Sbrigandini and Pantaloon the father. There was, too, a comical part for Rhodomont, as the roaring bully hired by Polichinelle to cut Léandre into ribbons. And in view of the importance now of Scaramouche, the play had been rechristened 'Figaro-Scaramouche.'

This last had not been without a deal of opposition from M. Binet. But his relentless collaborator, who was in reality the real author—drawing shamelessly, but practically, at last upon his great store of reading—had overborne him.

"You must move with the times, monsieur. In Paris Beaumarchais is the rage. Figaro is known to-day throughout the world. Let us borrow a little of his glory. It will draw the people in. They will come to see half a Figaro when they will not come to see a dozen Heartless Fathers. Therefore let us cast the mantle of Figaro upon someone, and proclaim it in our title."

"But as I am the head of the company . . ." began M. Binet weakly.

"If you will be blind to your interests, you will presently be a head without a body. And what use is that? Can the shoulders of Pantaloon carry the mantle of Figaro? You laugh. Of course you laugh. The notion is absurd. The proper person for the mantle of Figaro is Scaramouche, who is naturally Figaro's twin-brother."

Thus tyrannised, the tyrant Binet gave way, comforted by the reflection that if he understood anything at all about the theatre, he had for fifteen livres a month acquired something that would presently be earning him as many louis.

The company's reception of the canevas now confirmed him, if we except Polichinelle, who, annoyed at having lost half his part in the alterations, declared the new scenario fatuous.

"Ah! You call my work fatuous, do you?" M. Binet hectoring him.

"Your work?" said Polichinelle, to add with his tongue in his cheek: "Ah, pardon. I had not realised that you were the author."

"Then realise it now."

"You were very close with M. Parvissimus over this authorship," said Polichinelle, with impudent suggestiveness.

"And what if I was? What do you imply?"

"That you took him to cut quills for you, of course."

"I'll cut your ears for you if you're not civil" stormed the infuriated Binet.

Polichinelle got up slowly and stretched himself.

"Dieu de Dieu!" said he. "If Pantaloon is to play Rhodomont, I think I'll leave you. He is not amusing in the part." And he swaggered out before M. Binet had recovered from his speechlessness.

CHAPTER IV

EXIT MONSIEUR PARVISSIMUS

AT four o'clock on Monday afternoon the curtain rose on 'Figaro-Scaramouche' to an audience that filled three-quarters of the market-hall. M. Binet attributed this good attendance to the influx of people to Guichen for the fair and to the magnificent parade of his company through the streets of the township at the busiest time of the day. André-Louis attributed it entirely to the title. It was the Figaro touch that had fetched in the better-class bourgeoisie, which filled more than half of the twenty-sous places and three-quarters of the twelve-sous seats. The lure had drawn them. Whether it was to continue to do so would depend upon the manner in which the canevas over which he had laboured to the glory of Binet was interpreted by the company. Of the merits of the canevas itself he had no doubt. The authors upon whom he had drawn for the elements of it were sound, and he had taken of their best, which he claimed to be no more than the justice due to them.

The company excelled itself. The audience followed with gusto the sly intrigues of Scaramouche, delighted in the beauty and freshness of Climène, was moved almost to tears by the hard fate which through four long acts kept her from the hungering arms of the so beautiful Léandre, howled its delight over the ignominy of Pantaloon, the buffooneries of his sprightly lackey Harlequin, and the thrasonical strut and bellowing fierceness of the cowardly Rhodomont.

The success of the Binet troupe in Guichen was assured. That night the company drank Burgundy at M. Binet's expense. The takings reached the sum of eight louis, which was as good business as M. Binet had ever done in all his career. He was very pleased. Gratification rose like steam from his fat body. He even condescended so far as to attribute a share of the credit for the success to M. Parvissimus.

"His suggestion," he was careful to say, by way of properly delimiting that share, "was most valuable, as I perceived at the time."

"And his cutting of quills," growled Polichinelle. "Don't forget that. It is most important to have by you a man who understands how to cut a quill, as I shall remember when I turn author."

But not even that gibe could stir M. Binet out of his lethargy of content.

On Tuesday the success was repeated artistically and augmented financially. Ten louis and seven livres was the enormous sum that André-Louis, the doorkeeper, counted over to M. Binet after the performance. Never yet had M. Binet made so much money in one evening—and a miserable little village like Guichen was certainly the last place in which he would have expected this windfall.

"Ah, but Guichen in time of fair," André-Louis reminded him. "There are people here from as far as Nantes and Rennes to buy and sell. To-morrow, being the last day of the fair, the crowds will be greater than ever. We should better the evening's receipts."

"Better them? I shall be quite satisfied if we do as well, my friend."

"You can depend upon that," André-Louis assured him. "Are we to have Burgundy?"

And then the tragedy occurred. It announced itself in a succession of bumps and thuds, culminating in a crash outside the door that brought them all to their feet in alarm.

Pierrot sprang to open, and beheld the tumbled body of a man lying at the foot of the stairs. It emitted groans, therefore it was alive. Pierrot went forward to turn it over, and disclosed the fact that the body wore the wizened face of Scaramouche, a grimacing, groaning, twitching Scaramouche.

The whole company, pressing after Pierrot, abandoned itself to laughter.

"I always said you should change parts with me," cried Harlequin. "You're such an excellent tumbler. Have you been practising?"

"Fool!" Scaramouche snapped. "Must you be laughing when I've all but broken my neck?"

"You are right. We ought to be weeping because you didn't break it. Come, man, get up," and he held out a hand to the prostrate rogue.

Scaramouche took the hand, clutched it, heaved himself from the ground, then with a scream dropped back again.

"My foot!" he complained.

Binet rolled through the group of players, scattering them

to right and left. Apprehension had been quick to seize him. Fate had played him such tricks before.

"What ails your foot?" quoth he, sourly.

"It's broken, I think," Scaramouche complained.

"Broken? Bah! Get up, man." He caught him under the armpits and hauled him up.

Scaramouche came howling to one foot; the other doubled under him when he attempted to set it down, and he must have collapsed again but that Binet supported him. He filled the place with his plaint, whilst Binet swore amazingly and variedly.

"Must you bellow like a calf, you fool? Be quiet. A chair here, someone."

A chair was thrust forward. He crushed Scaramouche down into it.

"Let us look at this foot of yours."

Heedless of Scaramouche's howls of pain, he swept away shoe and stocking.

"What ails it?" he asked, staring. "Nothing that I can see." He seized it, heel in one hand, instep in the other, and gyrated it. Scaramouche screamed in agony until Climène caught Binet's arm and made him stop.

"My God, have you no feelings?" she reproved her father. "The lad has hurt his foot. Must you torture him? Will that cure it?"

"Hurt his foot!" said Binet. "I can see nothing the matter with his foot—nothing to justify all this uproar. He has bruised it, maybe . . ."

"A man with a bruised foot doesn't scream like that," said Madame over Climène's shoulder. "Perhaps he has dislocated it."

"That is what I fear," whimpered Scaramouche.

Binet heaved himself up in disgust. "Take him to bed," he bade them, "and fetch a doctor to see him."

It was done, and the doctor came. Having seen the patient, he reported that nothing very serious had happened, but that in falling he had evidently sprained his foot a little. A few days' rest, and all would be well.

"A few days!" cried Binet. "God of God! Do you mean that he can't walk?"

"It would be unwise, indeed impossible, for more than a few steps."

M. Binet paid the doctor's fee and sat down to think. He filled himself a glass of Burgundy, tossed it off without a word, and sat thereafter staring into the empty glass.

"It is, of course, the sort of thing that must always be happening to me," he grumbled to no one in particular. The members of the company were all standing in silence before him, sharing his dismay. "I might have known that this—or something like it—would occur to spoil the first vein of luck that I have found in years. Ah well, it is finished. To-morrow we pack and depart. The best day of the fair, on the crest of the wave of our success—a good fifteen louis to be taken and this happens! God of God!"

"Do you mean to abandon to-morrow's performance?"

All turned to stare with Binet at André-Louis.

"Are we to play 'Figaro-Scaramouche' without Scaramouche?" asked Binet, sneering.

"Of course not." André-Louis came forward. "But surely some re-arrangement of the parts is possible. For instance, there is a fine actor in Polichinelle."

Polichinelle swept him a bow. "Overwhelmed," said he, ever sardonic.

"But he has a part of his own," objected Binet.

"A small part, which Pasquariel could play."

"And who will play Pasquariel?"

"Nobody. We delete it. The play need not suffer."

"He thinks of everything," sneered Polichinelle. "What a man!"

But Binet was far from agreement. "Are you suggesting that Polichinelle should play Scaramouche?" he asked incredulously.

"Why not? He is able enough!"

"Overwhelmed again," interjected Polichinelle.

"Play Scaramouche with that figure?" Binet heaved himself up to point a denunciatory finger at Polichinelle's sturdy, thickset shortness.

"For lack of a better," said André-Louis.

"Overwhelmed more than ever." Polichinelle's bow was superb this time. "Faith, I think I'll take the air to cool me after so much blushing."

"Go to the devil," Binet flung at him.

"Better and better." Polichinelle made for the door. On the threshold he halted and struck an attitude. "Understand me, Binet. I do not now play Scaramouche in any circumstances whatever." And he went out. On the whole it was a very dignified exit.

André-Louis shrugged, threw out his arms, and let them fall to his sides again. "You have ruined everything," he told M. Binet. "The matter could easily have been arranged.

Well, well, it is you are master here; and since you want us to pack and be off, that is what we will do, I suppose."

He went out too. M. Binet stood in thought a moment, then followed him, his little eyes very cunning. He caught him up in the doorway. "Let us take a walk together. M. Parvissimus," said he, very affably.

He thrust his arm through André-Louis's, and led him out into the street, where there was still considerable movement. Past the booths that ranged about the market they went, and down the hill towards the bridge.

"I don't think we shall pack to-morrow," said M. Binet, presently. "In fact, we shall play to-morrow night."

"Not if I know Polichinelle. You have . . ."

"I am not thinking of Polichinelle."

"Of whom then?"

"Of yourself."

"I am flattered, sir. And in what capacity are you thinking of me?" There was something too sleek and oily in Binet's voice for André-Louis's taste.

"I am thinking of you in the part of Scaramouche."

"Day-dreams," said André-Louis. "You are amusing yourself, of course."

"Not in the least. I am quite serious."

"But I am not an actor."

"You told me that you could be."

"Oh, upon occasion . . . a small part, perhaps . . ."

"Well, here is a big part—the chance to arrive at a single stride. How many men have had such a chance?"

"It is a chance I do not covet M. Binet. Shall we change the subject?" He was very frosty, as much perhaps because he scented in M. Binet's manner something that was vaguely menacing as for any other reason.

"We'll change the subject when I please," said M. Binet, allowing a glimpse of steel to glimmer through the silk of him. "To-morrow night you play Scaramouche. You are ready enough in your wits, your figure is ideal, and you have just the kind of mordant humour for the part. You should be a great success."

"It is much more likely that I should be an egregious failure."

"That won't matter," said Binet, cynically and explained himself. "The failure will be personal to yourself. The receipts will be safe by then."

"Much obliged," said André-Louis.

"We should take fifteen louis to-morrow night."

"It is unfortunate that you are without a Scaramouche," said André-Louis.

"It is fortunate that I have one, M. Parvissimus."

André-Louis disengaged his arm. "I begin to find you tiresome," said he. "I think I will return."

"A moment, M. Parvissimus. If I am to lose that fifteen louis, you'll not take it amiss that I compensate myself in other ways?"

"That is your own concern, M. Binet."

"Pardon, M. Parvissimus. It may possibly be also yours." Binet took his arm again. "Do me the kindness to step across the street with me. Just as far as the post office there. I have something to show you."

André-Louis went. Before they reached the sheet of paper nailed upon the door, he knew exactly what it would say. And in effect it was, as he had supposed, that twenty louis would be paid for information leading to the apprehension of one André-Louis Moreau, lawyer of Gavrillac, who was wanted by the King's Lieutenant in Rennes upon a charge of sedition.

M. Binet watched him whilst he read. Their arms were linked, and Binet's grip was firm and powerful.

"Now, my friend," said he, "will you be M. Parvissimus and play Scaramouche to-morrow, or will you be André-Louis Moreau of Gavrillac and go to Rennes to satisfy the King's Lieutenant?"

"And if it should happen that you are mistaken?" quoth André-Louis, his face a mask.

"I'll take the risk of that," leered M. Binet. "You mentioned, I think, that you were a lawyer. An indiscretion, my dear. It is unlikely that two lawyers will be in hiding at the same time in the same district. You see it is not really clever of me. Well, M. André-Louis Moreau, lawyer, of Gavrillac, what is it to be?"

"We will talk it over as we walk back," said André-Louis.

"What is there to talk over?"

"One or two things, I think. I must know where I stand. Come, sir, if you please."

"Very well," said M. Binet, and they turned up the street again, but M. Binet maintained a firm hold of his young friend's arm, and kept himself on the alert for any tricks that the young gentleman might be disposed to play. It was an unnecessary precaution. André-Louis was not the man to waste his energy futilely. He knew that in bodily strength he was no match at all for the heavy and powerful Pantaloon.

"If I yield to your most eloquent and seductive persuasions,

M. Binet," said he sweetly, "what guarantee do you give me that you will not sell me for twenty louis after I shall have served your turn?"

"You have my word of honour for that." M. Binet was emphatic.

André-Louis laughed. "Oh, we are to talk of honour, are we? Really, M. Binet, it is clear you think me a fool."

In the dark he did not see the flush that leapt to M. Binet's round face. It was some moments before he replied.

"Perhaps you are right," he growled. "What guarantee do you want?"

"I do not know what guarantee you can possibly give."

"I have said that I will keep faith with you."

"Until you find it more profitable to sell me."

"You have it in your power to make it more profitable always for me to keep faith with you. It is due to you that we have done so well in Guichen. Oh, I admit it frankly."

"In private," said André-Louis.

M. Binet left the sarcasm unheeded.

"What you have done for us here with 'Figaro-Scaramouche' you can do elsewhere with other things. Naturally I shall not want to lose you. That is your guarantee."

"Yet to-night you would sell me for twenty louis."

"Because—name of God!—you enrage me by refusing me a service well within your powers. Don't you think, had I been entirely the rogue you think me, I could have sold you on Saturday last? I want you to understand me, my dear Parvissimus."

"I beg that you'll not apologise. You would be more tiresome than ever."

"Of course you will be gibing. You never miss a chance to gibe. It'll bring you trouble before you're done with life. Come; here we are back at the inn, and you have not yet given me your decision."

André-Louis looked at him. "I must yield, of course. I can't help myself."

M. Binet released his arm at last, and slapped him heartily upon the back. "Well declared, my lad. You'll never regret it. If I know anything of the theatre, I know that you have made the great decision of your life. To-morrow night you'll thank me."

André-Louis shrugged, and stepped out ahead towards the inn. But M. Binet called him back.

"M. Parvissimus!"

He turned. There stood the man's great bulk, the moonlight

beating down upon that round face of his, and he was holding out his hand.

"M. Parvissimus, no rancour. It is a thing I do not adm't into my life. You will shake hands with me, and we will forget all this."

André-Louis considered him a moment with disgust. He was growing angry. Then realising this, he conceived himself ridiculous, almost as ridiculous as that sly, scoundrelly Pantaloon. He laughed and took the outstretched hand.

"No rancour?" M. Binet insisted.

"Oh, no rancour," said André-Louis.

CHAPTER V

ENTER SCARAMOUCHE

DRESSED in the close-fitting suit of a bygone age, all black, from flat velvet cap to rosetted shoes, his face whitened and a slight upcurled moustache glued to his upper lip, a small-sword at his side and a guitar slung behind him, Scaramouche surveyed himself in a mirror, and was disposed to be sardonic—which was the proper mood for the character.

He reflected that his life, which until lately had been of a stagnant, contemplative quality, had suddenly become excessively active. In the course of one week he had been lawyer, mob-orator, outlaw, property-man, and finally buffoon. Last Wednesday he had been engaged in moving an audience of Rennes to anger; and on this Wednesday he was to move an audience of Guichen to mirth. Then he had been concerned to draw tears; to-day it was his business to provoke laughter. There was a difference, and yet there was a parallel. Then, as now, he had been a comedian; and the part that he played then was, when you came to think of it, akin to the part he was to play this evening. For what had he been at Rennes but a sort of Scaramouche—the little skirmisher, the astute intriguer, scattering the seed of trouble with a sly hand. The only difference lay in the fact that to-day he went forth under the name that properly described his type, whereas last week he had been disguised as a respectable young provincial attorney.

He bowed to his reflection in the mirror.

"Buffoon!" he apostrophised it. "At last you have found yourself. At last you have come into your heritage. You should be a great success."

Hearing his new name called out by M. Binet, he went below to find the company assembled and waiting in the entrance corridor of the inn.

He was, of course, an object of great interest to all the company. Most critically was he coned by M. Binet and Mademoiselle, by the former with gravely searching eyes, by the latter with a curl of scornful lip.

"You'll do," M. Binet commented his make-up. "At least you look the part."

"Unfortunately men are not always what they look," said Climène, acidly.

"That is a truth that does not at present apply to me," said André-Louis, "for it is the first time in my life that I look what I am."

Mademoiselle curled her lip a little further and turned her shoulder to him. But the others thought him very witty—probably because he was obscure. Columbine encouraged him with a friendly smile that displayed her large white teeth, and M. Binet swore yet once again that he would be a great success, since he threw himself with such spirit into the undertaking. Then, in a voice that for the moment he appeared to have borrowed from the roaring captain, M. Binet marshalled them for the short parade across to the market-hall.

The new Scaramouche fell into place beside Rhodomont. The old one, hobbling on a crutch, had departed an hour ago to take the place of doorkeeper, vacated of necessity by André-Louis. So that the exchange between those two was a complete one.

Headed by Polichinelle banging his great drum, and Pierrot blowing his trumpet, they set out, and were duly passed in review by the ragamuffins drawn up in files to enjoy so much of the spectacle as was to be obtained for nothing.

Ten minutes later the three knocks sounded, and the curtains were drawn aside, to reveal a battered set that was partly garden, partly forest, in which Climène feverishly looked for the coming of Léandre. In the wings stood the beautiful, melancholy lover, awaiting his cue, and immediately behind him the unfledged Scaramouche, who was anon to follow him.

André-Louis was assailed with nausea in that dread moment. He attempted to take a lightning mental review of the first act of this scenario of which he was himself the author-in-chief, but found his mind a complete blank. With the perspiration starting from his skin, he stepped back to the wall, where above a dim lantern was pasted a sheet bearing the brief outline of the piece. He was still studying it, when his arm was clutched,

and he was pulled violently towards the wings. He had a glimpse of Pantaloon's grotesque face, its eyes blazing, and he caught a raucous growl :

" Climène has spoken your cue three times already."

Before he realised it he had been bundled on to the stage, and stood there foolishly, blinking in the glare of the footlights with their tin reflectors. So utterly foolish and bewildered did he look, that volley upon volley of laughter welcomed him from the audience, which this evening packed the hall from end to end. Trembling a little, his bewilderment at first increasing, he stood there to receive that rolling tribute to his absurdity. Climène was eyeing him with expectant mockery, savouring in advance his humiliation ; Léandre regarded him in consternation, whilst behind the scenes M. Binet was dancing in fury.

" Name of a name," he groaned to the rather scared members of the company assembled there, " what will happen when they discover that he isn't acting ? "

But they never did discover it. Scaramouche's bewildered paralysis lasted but a few seconds. He realised that he was being laughed at, and remembered that his Scaramouche was a creature to be laughed with, and not at. He must save the situation ; twist it to his own advantage as best he could. And now his real bewilderment and terror was succeeded by acted bewilderment and terror far more marked, but not quite so funny. He contrived to make it clearly appear that his terror was of someone off the stage. He took cover behind a painted shrub, and thence, the laughter at last beginning to subside, he addressed himself to Climène and Léandre.

" Forgive me, beautiful lady, if the abrupt manner of my entrance startled you. The truth is that I have never been the same since that last affair of mine with Almaviva. My heart is not what it used to be. Down there at the end of the lane I came face to face with an elderly gentleman carrying a heavy cudgel, and the horrible thought entered my mind that it might be your father, and that our little stratagem to get you safely married might already have been betrayed to him. I think it was the cudgel put such a notion in my head. Not that I am afraid. I am not really afraid of anything. But I could not help reflecting that, if it should really have been your father, and he had broken my head with his cudgel, your hopes would have perished with me. For without me, what should you have done, my poor children ? "

A ripple of laughter from the audience had been steadily enheartening him, and helping him to recover his natural

impudence. It was clear they found him comical. They were to find him far more comical than ever he had intended, and that was largely due to a fortuitous circumstance upon which he had insufficiently reckoned. The fear of recognition by someone from Gavrillic or Rennes had been strong upon him. His face was sufficiently made up to baffle recognition; but there remained his voice. To dissemble this he had availed himself of the fact that Figaro was a Spaniard. He had known a Spaniard at Louis Le Grand who spoke a fluent but most extraordinary French, with a grotesque excess of sibilant sounds. It was an accent that he had often imitated, as youths will imitate characteristics that excite their mirth. Opportunely he had bethought him of that Spanish student, and it was upon his speech that to-night he modelled his own. The audience of Guichen found it as laughable on his lips as he and his fellows had found it formerly on the lips of that derided Spaniard.

Meanwhile behind the scenes, Binet—listening to that glib impromptu of which the scenario gave no indication—had recovered from his fears.

"Dieu de Dieu!" he whispered, grinning. "Did he do it then on purpose?"

It seemed to him impossible that a man who had been so terror-stricken as he had fancied André-Louis, could have recovered his wits so quickly and completely. Yet the doubt remained.

To resolve it after the curtain had fallen upon the first act that had gone with a verve unrivalled until this hour in the annals of the company, borne almost entirely upon the slim shoulders of the new Scaramouche, M. Binet bluntly questioned him.

They were standing in the space that did duty as green-room, the company all assembled there, showering congratulations upon their new recruit. Scaramouche, a little exalted at the moment by his success, however trivial he might consider it to-morrow, took then a full revenge upon Climène for the malicious satisfaction with which she had regarded his momentary blank terror.

"I do not wonder that you ask," said he. "Faith, I should have warned you that I intended to do my best from the start, to put the audience in a good humour with me. Mademoiselle very nearly ruined everything by refusing to reflect any of my terror. She was not even startled. Another time, mademoiselle, I shall give you full warning of my every intention."

She crimsoned under her grease-paint. But before she could find an answer of sufficient venom, her father was rating

her soundly for her stupidity—the more soundly because he himself had been deceived by Scaramouche's supreme acting.

Scaramouche's success in the first act was more than confirmed as the performance proceeded. Completely master of himself by now, and stimulated as only success can stimulate, he warmed to his work. Impudent, alert, sly, graceful, he incarnated the very ideal of Scaramouche, and he helped out his own native wit by many a remembered line from Beaumarchais, thereby persuading the better informed among the audience that here indeed was something of the real Figaro, and bringing them, as it were, into touch with the great world of the capital.

When at last the curtain fell for the last time, it was Scaramouche who shared with Climène the honours of the evening, his name that was coupled with hers in the calls that summoned them before the curtains.

As they stepped back, and the curtains screened them again from the departing audience, M. Binet approached them, rubbing his fat hands softly together. This runagate young lawyer, whom chance had blown into his company, had evidently been sent by fate to make his fortune for him. The sudden success at Guichen, hitherto unrivalled, should be repeated and augmented elsewhere. There would be no more sleeping under hedges and tightening of belts. Adversity was behind him. He placed a hand upon Scaramouche's shoulder and surveyed him with a smile whose oiliness not even his red paint and colossal false nose could dissemble.

"And what have you to say to me now?" he asked him. "Was I wrong when I assured you that you would succeed? Do you think I have followed my fortunes in the theatre for a lifetime without knowing a born actor when I see one? You are my discovery, Scaramouche. I have discovered you to yourself. I have set your feet upon the road to fame and fortune. I await your thanks."

Scaramouche laughed at him, and his laugh was not altogether pleasant.

"Always Pantaloon!" said he.

The great countenance became overcast. "I see that you do not yet forgive me the little stratagem by which I forced you to do justice to yourself. Ungrateful dog! As if I could have had any purpose but to make you; and I have done so. Continue as you have begun, and you will end in Paris. You may yet tread the stage of the Comédie Française, the rival of Talma, Flury and Dugazon. When that happens to you

perhaps you will feel the gratitude that is due to old Binet, for you will owe it all to this soft-hearted old fool."

"If you were as good an actor on the stage as you are in private," said Scaramouche, "you would yourself have won to the Comédie Française long since. But I bear no rancour, M. Binet." He laughed, and put out his hand. Binet fell upon it and wrung it heartily.

"That at least is something," he declared. "My boy, I have great plans for you—for us. To-morrow we go to Maure; there is a fair there to the end of this week. Then on Monday we take our chances at Pipriac, and after that we must consider. It maybe that I am about to realise the dream of my life. There must have been upwards of fifteen louis taken to-night. Where the devil is that rascal Cordemais?"

Cordemais was the name of the original Scaramouche, who had so unfortunately twisted his ankle. That Binet should refer to him by his secular designation was a sign that in the Binet company at least he had fallen for ever from the lofty eminence of Scaramouche.

"Let us go and find him, and then we'll away to the inn and crack a bottle of the best Burgundy, perhaps two bottles."

But Cordemais was not readily to be found. None of the company had seen him since the close of the performance. M. Binet went round to the entrance. Cordemais was not there. At first he was annoyed; then as he continued in vain to bawl the fellow's name, he began to grow uneasy; lastly, when Polichinelle, who was with them, discovered Cordemais's crutch standing discarded behind the door. M. Binet became alarmed. A dreadful suspicion entered his mind. He grew visibly pale under his paint.

"But this evening he couldn't walk without the crutch!" he exclaimed. "How then does he come to leave it there and take himself off?"

"Perhaps he has gone to the inn," suggested someone.

"But he couldn't walk without his crutch," M. Binet insisted.

Nevertheless, since clearly he was not anywhere about the market-hall, to the inn they all trooped, and deafened the landlady with their inquiries.

"Oh, yes, M. Cordemais came in some time ago."

"Where is he now?"

"He went away again at once. He just came for his bag."

"For his bag!" Binet was on the point of apoplexy.

"How long ago was that?"

She glanced at the timepiece on the overmantel. "It would

be about half an hour ago. It was a few minutes before the Rennes diligence passed through."

"The Rennes diligence!" M. Binet was almost inarticulate. "Could he . . . could he walk?" he asked, on a note of terrible anxiety.

"Walk? He ran like a hare when he left the inn. I thought, myself, that his agility was suspicious, seeing how lame he had been since he fell downstairs yesterday. Is anything wrong?"

M. Binet had collapsed into a chair. He took his head in his hands and groaned.

"The scoundrel was shamming all the time!" exclaimed Climène. "His fall downstairs was a trick. He was playing for this. He has swindled us."

"Fifteen louis at least—perhaps sixteen!" said M. Binet. "Oh, the heartless blackguard! To swindle me who have been as a father to him—and to swindle me in such a moment."

From the ranks of the silent, awe-struck company, each member of which was wondering by how much of the loss his own meagre pay would be mulcted, there came a splutter of laughter.

M. Binet glared with blood-injected eyes.

"Who laughs?" he roared. "What heartless wretch has the audacity to laugh at my misfortune?"

André-Louis, still in the sable glories of Scaramouche, stood forward. He was laughing still.

"It is you, is it? You may laugh on another note, my friend, if I choose a way to recoup myself that I know of."

"Dullard!" Scaramouche scorned him. "Rabbit-brained elephant! What if Cordemais has gone with fifteen louis? Hasn't he left you something worth twenty times as much?"

M. Binet gaped uncomprehending.

"You are between two wines, I think. You've been drinking," he concluded.

"So I have—at the fountain of Thalia. Oh, don't you see? Don't you see the treasure that Cordemais has left behind him?"

"What has he left?"

"A unique idea for the groundwork of a scenario. It unfolds itself all before me. I'll borrow part of the title from Molière. We'll call it 'Les Fourberies de Scaramouche,' and if we don't leave the audiences of Maure and Pipriac with sides aching with laughter I'll play the dullard Pantaloon in future."

Polichinelle smacked fist into palm. "Superb!" he said, fiercely. "To cull fortune from misfortune, to turn loss into profit, that is to have genius."

Scaramouche made a leg. "Polichinelle, you are a fellow after my own heart. I love a man who can discern my merit. If Pantaloon had half your wit, we should have Burgundy to-night in spite of the flight of Cordemais."

"Burgundy?" roared M. Binet, and before he could get farther Harlequin had clapped his hands together.

"That is the spirit, M. Binet. You heard him, landlady? He called for Burgundy."

"I called for nothing of the kind."

"But you heard him, dear madame. We all heard him."

The others made chorus, whilst Scaramouche smiled at him and patted his shoulder.

"Up, man, a little courage. Did you not say that fortune awaits us? And have we not now the wherewithal to constrain fortune? Burgundy, then, to toast 'Les Fourberies de Scaramouche.'"

And M. Binet, who was not blind to the force of the idea, yielded, took courage, and got drunk with the rest.

CHAPTER VI

CLIMÈNE

DILIGENT search among the many scenarios of the improvisers which have survived their day has failed to bring to light the scenario of 'Les Fourberies de Scaramouche,' upon which we are told the fortunes of the Binet troupe came to be soundly established. They played it for the first time at Maure in the following week, with André-Louis who was known by now as Scaramouche to all the company, and to the public alike, in the title-rôle. If he had acquitted himself well as Figaro-Scaramouche, he excelled himself in the new piece, the scenario of which would appear to be very much the better of the two.

After Maure came Pipriac, where four performances were given, two of each of the scenarios that now formed the backbone of the Binet repertoire. In both Scaramouche, who was beginning to find himself, materially improved his performances. So smoothly now did the two pieces run that André-Louis actually suggested to Binet that after Fougeray, which they were to visit in the following week, they should tempt fortune in a real theatre in the important town of Rédon. The notion terrified Binet at first, but coming to think of it, and his

ambition being fanned by André-Louis, he ended by allowing himself to succumb to the temptation.

It seemed to André-Louis in those days that he had found his real *métier*, and not only was he beginning to like it, but actually to look forward to a career as actor-author that might indeed lead him in the end to that Mecca of all comedians, the Comédie Française. And there were other possibilities. From the writing of skeleton scenarios for improvisers, he might presently pass to writing plays of dialogue, plays in the proper sense of the word, after the manner of Chénier, Eglantine and Beaumarchais.

The fact that he dreamed such dreams shows us how very kindly he had taken to the profession into which Chance and M. Binet between them had conspired to thrust him. That he had real talent, both as author and as actor, I do not doubt ; and I am persuaded that had things fallen out differently he would have won for himself a lasting place among French dramatists, and thus fully have realised that dream of his.

Now, dream though it was, he did not neglect the practical side of it.

"You realise," he told M. Binet, "that I have it in my power to make your fortune for you?"

He and Binet were sitting alone together in the parlour of the inn at Pipriac, drinking a very excellent bottle of Volnay. It was on the night after the fourth and last performance there of 'Les Fourberies.' The business in Pipriac had been as excellent as in Maure and Guichen. You will have gathered this from the fact that they drank Volnay.

"I will concede it, my dear Scaramouche, so that I may hear the sequel."

"I am disposed to exercise this power if the inducement is sufficient. You will realise that for fifteen livres a month a man does not sell such exceptional gifts as mine."

"There is an alternative," said M. Binet, darkly.

"There is no alternative. Don't be a fool, Binet."

Binet sat up as if he had been prodded. Members of his company did not take this tone of direct rebuke with him.

"Anyway, I make you a present of it," Scaramouche pursued airily. "Exercise it if you please. Step outside and inform the police that they can lay hands upon one André-Louis Moreau. But that will be the end of your fine dreams of going to Rédon, and for the first time in your life playing in a real theatre. Without me, you can't do it and you know it ; and I am not going to Rédon or anywhere else, in fact I am not going to Fourgeray, until we have an equitable arrangement."

"But what heat!" complained Binet, "and all for what? Why must you assume that I have the soul of a usurer? When our little arrangement was made, I had no idea—how could I?—that you would prove as valuable to me as you are? You had but to remind me, my dear Scaramouche. I am a just man. As from to-day you shall have thirty livres a month. See, I double it at once. I am a generous man."

"But you're not ambitious. Now listen to me a moment."

And he proceeded to unfold a scheme that filled Binet with a paralysing terror.

"After Rédon, Nantes," he said. "Nantes and the Théâtre Feydau."

M. Binet choked in the act of drinking. The Théâtre Feydau was a sort of provincial Comédie Française. The great Fleury had played there to an audience as critical as any in France. The very thought of Rédon, cherished as it had come to be by M. Binet, gave him at moments a cramp in the stomach, so dangerously ambitious did it seem to him. And Rédon was a puppet-show by comparison with Nantes. Yet this raw lad whom he had picked up by chance three weeks ago, and who in that time had blossomed from a country attorney into author and actor, could talk of Nantes and the Théâtre Feydau without changing colour.

"But why not Paris and the Comédie Français?" wondered M. Binet, with sarcasm, when at last he had got his breath.

"That may come later," said impudence.

"Eh? You've been drinking, my friend."

But André-Louis detailed the plan that had been forming in his mind. Fougeray should be a training ground for Rédon, and Rédon should be a training ground for Nantes. They would stay in Rédon as long as Rédon would pay adequately to come and see them, working hard to perfect themselves the while. They would add three or four new players of talent to the company; he would write three or four fresh scenarios, and these should be tested and perfected until the troupe was in possession of at least half a dozen plays upon which they could depend; they would lay out a portion of their profits on better dresses and better scenery, and finally in a couple of months' time, if all went well, they should be ready to make their real bid for fortune at Nantes. It was quite true that distinction was usually demanded of the companies appearing at the Feydau, but, on the other hand, Nantes had not seen a troupe of improvisers for a generation and longer. They would be supplying a novelty to which all Nantes should flock, provided that the work were really well done; and Scaramouche undertook—pledged himself—that if matters were left in his own hands, his projected revival

of the *Commedia dell'Arte* in all its glories would exceed whatever expectations the public of Nantes might bring to the theatre.

"We'll talk of Paris after Nantes," he finished, supremely matter-of-fact, "just as we will definitely decide on Nantes after Rédon."

The persuasiveness that could sway a mob ended by sweeping M. Binet off his feet. The prospect which Scaramouche unfolded, if terrifying, was also intoxicating, and as Scaramouche delivered a crushing answer to each weakening objection in a measure as it was advanced, Binet ended by promising to think the matter over.

"Rédon will point the way," said André-Louis, "and I don't doubt which way Rédon will point."

Thus the great adventure of Rédon dwindled to insignificance. Instead of a terrifying undertaking in itself, it became merely a rehearsal for something greater. In his momentary exaltation, Binet proposed another bottle of Volnay. Scaramouche waited until the cork was drawn before he continued.

"The thing remains possible," said he then, holding his glass to the light, and speaking casually, "as long as I am with you."

"Agreed, my dear Scaramouche, agreed. Our chance meeting was a fortunate thing for both of us."

"For both of us," said Scaramouche, with stress. "That is as I would have it. So that I do not think you will surrender me just yet to the police."

"As if I could think of such a thing! My dear Scaramouche, you amuse yourself. I beg that you will never, never allude to that little joke of mine again."

"It is forgotten," said André-Louis. "And now for the remainder of my proposal. If I am to become the architect of your fortunes, if I am to build as I have planned them, then I must also and in the same degree become the architect of my own."

"In the same degree?" M. Binet frowned.

"In the same degree. From to-day, if you please, we will conduct the affairs of this company in a proper manner, and we will keep account books."

"I am an artist," said M. Binet, with pride. "I am not a merchant."

"There is a business side to your art, and that shall be conducted in the business manner. I have thought it all out for you. You shall not be troubled with details that might hinder the due exercise of your art. All that you have to do is to say yes or no to my proposal."

"Ah? And the proposal?"

"Is that you constitute me your partner, with an equal share in the profits of your company?"

Pantaloön's great countenance grew pale, his little eyes widened to their fullest extent as he coned the face of his companion. Then he exploded.

"You are mad, of course, to make me such a proposal so monstrous."

"It has its injustices, I admit. But I have provided for them. It would not, for instance, be fair, that in addition to all that I am proposing to do for you, I should also play Scaramouche and write your scenarios without any reward outside of the half profit which would come to me as a partner. Thus, before the profits come to be divided, there is a salary to be paid me as actor, and a small sum for each scenario with which I provide the company; that is a matter for mutual agreement. Similarly, you shall be paid a salary as Pantaloön. After those expenses are cleared up, as well as all the other salaries and disbursements, the residue is the profit to be divided equally between us."

It was not, as you can imagine, a proposal that M. Binet would swallow at a draught. He began with a point-blank refusal to consider it.

"In that case, my friend," said Scaramouche, "we part company at once. To-morrow I shall bid you a reluctant farewell."

Binet fell to raging. He spoke of ingratitude in feeling terms; he even permitted himself another sly illusion to that little jest of his concerned with the police, which he had promised never again to mention.

"As to that, you may do as you please. Play the informer, by all means. But consider that you will just as definitely be deprived of my services, and that without me you are nothing—as you were before I joined your company."

M. Binet did not care what the consequences might be. A fig for consequences! He would teach this impudent young country attorney that M. Binet was not the man to be imposed upon.

Scaramouche rose. "Very well," said he, between indifference and resignation. "As you wish. But before you act sleep on the matter. In the cold light of morning you may see our two proposals in their proper proportions. Mine spells fortune for both of us. Yours spells ruin for both of us. Good-night, M. Binet. Heaven help you to a wise decision."

The decision to which M. Binet finally came was naturally the only one possible in the face of so firm a resolve as that of

André-Louis, who held the trumps. Of course there were further discussions before all was settled, and M. Binet was brought to an agreement only after an infinity of haggling surprising in one who was an artist and not a man of business. One or two concessions were made by André-Louis; he consented, for instance to waive his claim to be paid for scenarios, and he also consented that M. Binet should appoint himself a salary that was out of all proportion to his deserts.

Thus in the end the matter was settled, and the announcement duly made to the assembled company. There were, of course, jealousies and resentments. But these were not deep-seated, and they were readily swallowed when it was discovered that under the new management the lot of the entire company was to be materially improved from the point of view of salaries. This was a matter that had met with considerable opposition from M. Binet. But the irresistible Scaramouche swept away all objections.

"If we are to play at the Feydau, you want a company of self-respecting comedians, and not a pack of cringing starvelings. The better we pay them in reason, the more they will earn for us."

Thus was conquered the company's resentment of this too swift promotion of its latest recruit. Cheerfully now—with one exception—they accepted the dominance of Scaramouche, a dominance soon to be so firmly established that M. Binet himself came under it.

The one exception was Climène. Her failure to bring to heel this interesting young stranger, who had almost literally dropped into their midst that morning outside Gruichen, had begotten in her a malice which his persistent ignoring of her had been steadily inflaming. She had remonstrated with her father when the new partnership was first formed. She had lost her temper with him, and called him a fool, whereupon M. Binet—in Pantaloon's best manner—had lost his temper in his turn and boxed her ears. She piled it up to the account of Scaramouche, and spied her opportunity to pay off some of that ever-increasing score. But opportunities were few. Scaramouche was too occupied just then. During the week of preparation at Fougéray he was hardly seen save at the performances, whilst, when once they were at Rédon he came and went like the wind between the theatre and the inn.

The Rédon experiment had justified itself from the first. Stimulated and encouraged by this, André-Louis worked day and night during the month they spent in that busy little town. The moment had been well-chosen for the trade in chestnuts,

of which Rédon is the centre, was just then at its height. And every afternoon the little theatre was packed with spectators. The fame of the troupe had gone forth, borne by the chestnut-growers of the district, who were bringing their wares to Rédon market, and the audiences were made up of people from the surrounding country, and from neighbouring villages as far out as Allaire St. Perrioux, and St. Nicholas. To keep the business from slackening André-Louis prepared a new scenario every week. He wrote three in addition to those two with which he had already supplied the company; these were 'The Marriage of Pantaloon,' 'The Shy Lover,' and 'The Terrible Captain.' Of these the last was the greatest success. It was based upon the *Miles Gloriosus* of Plautus, with great opportunities for Rhodomont, and a good part for Scaramouche as the roaring captain's sly lieutenant. Its success was largely due to the fact that André-Louis amplified the scenario to the extent of indicating very fully in places the lines which the dialogue should follow, whilst here and there he had gone so far as to supply some of the actual dialogue to be spoken, without, however, making it obligatory upon the actors to keep to the letter of it.

And meanwhile, as the business prospered, he became busy with tailors, improving the wardrobe of the company, which was sorely in need of improvement. He ran to earth a couple of needy artists, lured them into the company to play small parts—apothecaries and notaries—and set them to beguile their leisure in painting new scenery, so as to be ready for what he called the conquest of Nantes, which was to come in the new year. Never in his life had he worked so hard; never in his life had he worked at all in comparison with his activities now. His fund of energy and enthusiasm was inexhaustible, like that of his good humour. He came and went, acted, wrote, conceived, directed, planned and executed, what time M. Binet took his ease at last in comparative affluence, drank Burgundy every night, ate white bread and other delicacies, and began to congratulate himself upon his astuteness in having made this industrious, tireless fellow his partner. Having discovered how idle had been his fears of performing at Rédon, he now began to dismiss the terrors with which the notion of Nantes had haunted him.

And his happiness was reflected throughout the ranks of his company, with the single exception always of Climène. She had ceased to sneer at Scaramouche, having realised at last that her sneers left him untouched and recoiled upon herself. Thus her almost indefinable resentment of him was increased by being stifled, until, at all costs, an outlet for it must be found.

One day she threw herself in his way as he was leaving the theatre after the performance. The others had already gone, and she had returned upon pretence of having forgotten something.

"Will you tell me what I have done to you?" she asked him, point-blank.

"Done to me, mademoiselle?" He did not understand.

She made a gesture of impatience. "Why do you hate me?"

"Hate you, mademoiselle? I do not hate anybody. It is the most stupid of all the emotions. I have never hated—not even my enemies."

"What Christian resignation."

"As for hating you, of all people. Why . . . I consider you adorable. I envy Léandre every day of my life. I have seriously thought of setting him to play Scaramouche and playing lovers myself."

"I don't think you would be a success," said she.

"That is the only thing that restrains me. And yet, given the inspiration that is given Léandre, it is possible that I might be convincing."

"Why, what inspiration do you mean?"

"The inspiration of playing to so adorable a Climène."

Her lazy eyes were now alert to search that lean face of his.

"You are laughing at me," said she, and swept past him into the theatre on her pretended quest. There was nothing to be done with such a fellow. He was utterly without feeling. He was not a man at all.

Yet when she came forth again at the end of some five minutes, she found him still lingering at the door.

"Not gone yet?" she asked him, superciliously.

"I was waiting for you, mademoiselle. You will be walking to the inn. If I might escort you . . ."

"But what gallantry! What condescension!"

"Perhaps you would prefer that I did not?"

"How could I prefer that, Monsieur Scaramouche? Besides we are both going the same way, and the streets are common to all. It is that I am overwhelmed by this unusual honour."

He looked into her piquant little face, and noted how obscured it was by its cloud of dignity. He laughed.

"Perhaps I feared that the honour was not sought."

"Ah, now I understand," she cried. "It is for me to seek these honours. I am to woo a man before he will pay me the homage of civility. It must be so, since you, who clearly

know everything, have said so. It remains for me to beg your pardon for my ignorance."

"It amuses you to be cruel," said Scaramouche. "No matter. Shall we walk?"

They set out together, stepping briskly to warm their blood against the wintry evening air. Awhile they went in silence, yet each furtively observing the other.

"And so you find me cruel?" she challenged him at length, thereby betraying the fact that the accusation had struck home.

He looked at her with a half smile. "Will you deny it?"

"You are the first man that ever accused me of it."

"I dare not suppose myself the first man to whom you have been cruel. That were an assumption too flattering to myself. I must prefer to think that the others suffered in silence."

"Mon Dieu! Have you suffered?" She was between seriousness and raillery.

"I place the confession as an offering on the altar of your vanity."

"I should never have suspected it."

"How could you? Am I not what your father calls a natural actor? I was an actor long before I became Scaramouche. Therefore I have laughed. I often do when I am hurt. When you were pleased to be disdainful, I acted disdain in my turn."

"You acted very well," said she, without reflecting.

"Of course, I am an excellent actor."

"And why this sudden change?"

"In response to the change in you. You have grown weary of your part of cruel madam—a dull part, believe me, and unworthy of your talents. Were I a woman, and had I your loveliness and your grace, Climène, I should disdain to use them as weapons of offence."

"Loveliness and grace!" she echoed, feigning amused surprise. But the vain baggage was mollified. "When was it you discovered this beauty and this grace, M. Scaramouche?"

He looked at her a moment, considering the sprightly beauty of her, the adorable femininity that from the first had so irresistibly attracted him.

"One morning when I beheld you rehearsing a love scene with Léandre."

He caught the surprise that leapt to her eyes before she veiled them under drooping lids from his too questing gaze.

"Why, that was the first time you saw me."

"I had no earlier occasion to remark your charms."

' You ask me to believe too much,' said she, but her tone was softer than he had ever known it yet.

" Then you'll refuse to believe me if I confess that it was this grace and beauty that determined my destiny that day by urging me to join your father's troupe ? "

At that she became a little out of breath. There was no longer any question of finding an outlet for resentment. Resentment was all forgotten.

" But why ? With what object ? "

" With the object of asking you one day to be my wife."

She halted under the shock of that, and swung round to face him. Her glance met his own without shyness now, there was a hardening glitter in her eyes, a faint stir of colour in her cheeks. She suspected him of an unpardonable mockery.

" You go very fast, don't you ? " she asked him, with heat.

" I do. Haven't you observed it ? I am a man of sudden impulses. See what I have made of the Binet troupe in less than a couple of months. Another might have laboured for a year and not achieved the half of it. Shall I be slower in love than in work ? Would it be reasonable to expect it ? I have curbed and repressed myself not to scare you by precipitancy. In that I have done violence to my feelings, and, more than all, in using the same cold aloofness with which you chose to treat me. I have waited—oh, so patiently !—until you should tire of that mood of cruelty."

" You are an amazing man," said she, quite colourlessly.

" I am," he agreed with her. " It is only the conviction that I am not commonplace that has permitted me to hope as I have hoped."

Mechanically, and as if by tacit consent, they resumed their walk.

" And I ask you to observe," he said, " when you complain that I go very fast, that, after all, I have so far asked you for nothing."

" How ? " quoth she, frowning.

" I have merely told you of my hopes. I am not so rash as to ask at once whether I may realise them."

" My faith, but that is prudent," said she, tartly.

" Of course."

It was his self-possession that exasperated her ; for after that she walked the short remainder of the way in silence, and so, for the moment, the matter was left just there.

But that night, after they had supped, it chanced that when Climène was about to retire, he and she were alone together in

he room above stairs that her father kept exclusively for his company. The Binet troupe you see, was rising in the world.

As Climène now rose to withdraw for the night, Scaramouche rose with her to light her candle. Holding it in her left hand, she offered him her right, a long, tapering, white hand at the end of a softly-rounded arm that was bare to the elbow.

"Good-night, Scaramouche," she said, but so softly, so tenderly, that he caught his breath, and stood conning her, his dark eyes aglow.

Thus a moment, then he took the tips of her fingers in his grasp, and, bowing over the hand, pressed his lips upon it. Then he looked at her again. The intense femininity of her lured him on, invited him, surrendered to him. Her face was pale, there was a glitter in her eyes, a curious smile upon her parted lips, and under its fichu-menteur her bosom rose and fell to complete the betrayal of her.

By the hand he continued to hold, he drew her towards him. She came unresisting. He took the candle from her, and set it down on the sideboard, by which she stood. The next moment her slight, lithe body was in his arms, and he was kissing her, murmuring her name as if it were a prayer.

"Am I cruel now?" she asked him, panting. He kissed her again for only answer. "You made me cruel because you would not see," she told him next in a whisper.

And then the door opened, and M. Binet came in to have his paternal eyes regaled by this highly indecorous behaviour of his daughter.

He stood at gaze, whilst they quite leisurely, and in a self-possession too complete to be natural, detached each from the other.

"And what may be the meaning of this?" demanded M. Binet, bewildered and profoundly shocked.

"Does it require explaining?" asked Scaramouche. "Doesn't it speak for itself—eloquently? It means that Climène and I have taken it into our heads to be married."

"And doesn't it matter what I may take into my head?"

"Of course. But you could neither have the bad taste nor the bad heart to offer any obstacle."

"You take it for granted? Ay, that is your way, to be sure—to take things for granted. But my daughter is not to be taken for granted. I have very definite views for my daughter. You have done an unworthy thing, Scaramouche. You have betrayed my trust in you. I am very angry with you."

He rolled forward with his ponderous yet curiously noiseless

gait. Scaramouche turned to her, smiling, and handed her the candle.

"If you will leave us, Climène, I will ask your hand of your father in proper form."

She vanished, a little fluttered lovelier than ever in her mixture of confusion and timidity. Scaramouche closed the door and faced the enraged M. Binet, who had flung himself into an arm-chair at the head of the short table, faced him with the avowed purpose of asking for Climène's hand in proper form. And this was how he did it :

"Father-in-law," said he, "I congratulate you. This will certainly mean the Comédie Française for Climène, and that before long ; and you shall shine in the glory she will reflect. As the father of Madame Scaramouche you may yet be famous."

Binet, his face slowly empurpling, glared at him, in speechless stupefaction. His rage was the more utter from his humiliating conviction that, whatever he might say or do, this irresistible fellow would bend him to his will. At last speech came to him.

"You're a damned corsair !" he cried, thickly, banging his ham-like fist upon the table. "A corsair ! First you sail in and plunder me of half my legitimate gains ; and now you want to carry off my daughter. But I'll be damned if I'll give her to a graceless, nameless scoundrel like you, for whom the gallows are waiting already."

Scaramouche pulled the bell-rope, not at all discomposed. He smiled. There was a flush on his cheeks and a gleam in his eyes. He was very pleased with the world that night. He really owed a great debt to M. de Lesdiguières.

"Binet," said he, "forget for once that you are a Pantaloon and behave as a nice, amiable father-in-law should behave when he has secured a son-in-law of exceptional merits. We are going to have a bottle of Burgundy at my expense, and it shall be the best bottle of Burgundy to be found in Rédon. Compose yourself to do fitting honour to it. Excitations of the bile invariably impair the fine sensitiveness of the palate."

CHAPTER VII

THE CONQUEST OF NANTES

THE Binet Troupe opened in Nantes—as you may discover in surviving copies of the *Courrier Nantais*—on the Feast of the Purification with ‘Les Fourberies de Scaramouche.’ But they did not come to Nantes as hitherto they had gone to little country villages and townships, unheralded and depending entirely upon the parade of their entrance to attract attention to themselves. André-Louis had borrowed from the business methods of the Comédie Française. Carrying matters with a high hand entirely in his own fashion, he had ordered at Rédon the printing of play bills, and four days before the company’s descent upon Nantes these bills were pasted outside the Théâtre Feydau and elsewhere about the town, and had attracted—being still sufficiently unusual announcements at the time—considerable attention. He had entrusted the matter to one of the company’s latest recruits, an intelligent young man named Basque, sending him on ahead of the company for the purpose.

You may see for yourself one of these playbills in the Carnavalet Museum. It details the players by their stage names only, with the exception of M. Binet and his daughter, and, leaving out of account that he who plays Trivelin in one piece appears as Tabarin in another, it makes the company appear to be at least half as numerous again as it really was. It announces that they will open with the ‘Fourberies de Scaramouche,’ to be followed by five other plays of which it gives the titles, and by others not named, which shall also be added should the patronage to be received in the distinguished and enlightened city of Nantes encourage the Binet Troupe to prolong its sojourn at the Théâtre Feydau. It lays great stress upon the fact that this is a company of improvisers in the old Italian manner, the like of which has not been seen in France for half a century, and it exhorts the public of Nantes not to miss this opportunity of witnessing these distinguished mimes who are reviving for them the glories of the Comédie de l’Art. Their visit to Nantes—the announcement proceeds—is preliminary to their visit to Paris, where they intend to throw down the glove to the actors of the Comédie Française, and to show the world how superior is the art of the improviser to that of the actor who depends upon an author for what he shall say, and who consequently says always the same thing every time that he plays in the same piece.

It is an audacious bill, and its audacity had scared M. Binet out of the little sense left him by the Burgundy, which in these days he could afford to abuse. He had offered the most vehement opposition. Part of this André-Louis had swept aside; part he had disregarded.

"I admit that it is audacious," said Scaramouche. "But at your time of life you should have learnt that in this world nothing succeeds like audacity."

"I forbid it, I absolutely forbid it," M. Binet insisted.

"I knew you would. Just as I know that you'll be very grateful to me presently for not obeying you."

"You are inviting a catastrophe."

"I am inviting fortune. The worst catastrophe that can overtake you is to be back in the market-halls of the country villages from which I rescued you. I'll have you in Paris yet in spite of yourself. Leave this to me."

And he went out to attend to the printing. Nor did his preparations end there. He wrote a piquant article on the glories of the Comédie de l'Art, and its resurrection by the improvising troupe of the great mime Florimond Binet. Binet's name was not Florimond; it was just Pierre. But André-Louis had a great sense of the theatre. That article was an amplification of the stimulating matter contained in the playbills; and he persuaded Basque, who had relations in Nantes, to use all the influence he could command, and all the bribery they could afford, to get that article printed in the *Courrier Nantais* a couple of days before the arrival of the Binet Troupe.

Basque had succeeded, and considering the undoubted literary merits and intrinsic interest of the article, this is not at all surprising.

And so it was upon an already expectant city that Binet and his company descended in that first week of February. M. Binet would have made his entrance in the usual manner—a full dress parade with banging drums and crashing cymbals. But to this André-Louis offered the most relentless opposition.

"We should but discover our poverty," said he. "Instead we will creep into the city unobserved, and leave ourselves to the imagination of the public."

He had his way, of course. M. Binet, worn already with battling against the strong waters of this young man's will, was altogether unequal to the contest now that he found Climène in alliance with Scaramouche, adding her insistence to his and joining with him in reprobation of her father's sluggish and reactionary wits. Metaphorically, M. Binet threw up his arms, and cursing the day on which he had taken this young

man into his troupe, he allowed the current to carry him whither it would. He was persuaded that he would be drowned in the end. Meanwhile he could drown his vexation in Burgundy. At least there was abundance of Burgundy. Never in his life had he found Burgundy so plentiful. Perhaps things were not as bad as he imagined, after all. He reflected that, when all was said, he had to thank Scaramouche for the Burgundy. Whilst fearing the worst, he would hope for the best.

And it was very much the worst that he feared as he waited in the wings when the curtain rose on that first performance of theirs at the Théâtre Feydau to a house that was tolerably filled by a public whose curiosity the preliminary announcements had thoroughly stimulated.

Although the scenario of 'Les Fourberies de Scaramouche' had not, apparently, survived, yet we know from André-Louis's "Confessions" that it is opened by Polichinelle in the character of an arrogant and fiercely jealous lover shown in the act of beguiling the waiting-maid, Columbine, to play the spy upon her mistress, Climène. Beginning with cajolery, but failing in this with the saucy Columbine, who likes cajolers to be at least attractive and to pay a due deference to her own very piquant charms, the fierce humpbacked scoundrel passes on to threats of the terrible vengeance he will wreck upon her if she betrays him or neglects to obey him implicitly; failing here likewise, he finally has recourse to bribery, and after he has bled himself freely to the very expectant Columbine, he succeeds by these means in obtaining her consent to spy upon Climène, and to report to him upon her lady's conduct.

The pair played the scene well together, stimulated perhaps by their very nervousness at finding themselves before so imposing an audience. Polichinelle was everything that is fierce, contemptuous, and insistent; Columbine was the essence of pert indifference under his cajolery, saucily mocking under his threats, and finely sly in extorting the very maximum when it came to accepting a bribe. Laughter rippled through the audience and promised well. But M. Binet, standing trembling in the wings, missed the great guffaws of the rustic spectators to whom they had played hitherto, and his fears steadily mounted.

Then, scarcely has Polichinelle departed by the door, than Scaramouche bounds in through the window. It was an effective entrance, usually performed with a broad comic effect that set the people in a roar. Not so on this occasion. Meditating in bed that morning, Scaramouche had decided to present himself in a totally different aspect. He would cut

out all the broad play, all the usual clowning which had delighted their past rude audiences, and he would obtain his effects by subtlety instead. He would present a slyly humorous rogue, restrained, and of a certain dignity, wearing a countenance of complete solemnity, speaking his lines dryly, as if unconscious of the humour with which he intended to invest them. Thus, though it might take the audience longer to understand and discover him, they would like him all the better in the end.

True to that resolve, he now played his part as the friend and hired ally of the love-sick Léandre, on whose behalf he came for news of Climène, seizing the opportunity to further his own amour with Columbine and his designs upon the moneybags o' Pantaloon. Also he had taken certain liberties with the traditional costume of Scaramouche; he had caused the black doublet and breeches to be slashed with red, and the doublet to be cut more to a peak, *à la* Henri III. The conventional black velvet cap he had replaced by a conical hat with a turned-up brim and a tuft of feathers on the left, and he had discarded his guitar.

M. Binet listened desperately for the roar of laughter that usually greeted the entrance of Scaramouche, and his dismay increased when it did not come. And then he became conscious of something alarmingly unusual in Scaramouche's manner. The sibilant foreign accent was there, but none of the broad boisterousness their audiences had loved.

He wrung his hands in despair. "It is all over," he said. "The fellow has ruined us. It serves me right for being a fool, and allowing him to take control of everything."

But he was profoundly mistaken. He began to have an inkling of this when presently, himself, he took the stage, and found the public attentive, remarked a grin of quiet appreciation on every upturned face. It was not, however, until the thunders of applause greeted the fall of the curtain on the first act that he felt quite sure they would be allowed to escape with their lives.

Had the part of Pantaloon in 'Les Fourberies' been other than that of a blundering, timid old idiot, Binet would have ruined it by his apprehensions. As it was, those very apprehensions, magnifying as they did the hesitancy and bewilderment that were the essence of his part, contributed to the success. And a success it proved that more than justified all the heralding of which Scaramouche had been guilty.

For Scaramouche himself this success was not confined to the public. At the end of the play a great reception awaited him from his companions assembled in the green-room of the

theatre His talent, resource and energy had raised them in a few weeks from a pack of vagrant mountebanks to a self-respecting company of first-rate players. They acknowledged it generously in a speech entrusted to Polichinelle, adding the tribute to his genius that, as they had conquered Nantes, so would they conquer the world under his guidance.

In their enthusiasm they were a little neglectful of the feelings of M. Binet. Irritated enough had he been already by the over-riding of his every wish, by the consciousness of his weakness when opposed to Scaramouche. And although he had suffered the gradual process of usurpation of authority because its every step had been attended by his own greater profit, deep down in him the resentment abode to stifle every spark of that gratitude due from him to his partner. To-night his nerves had been on the rack, and he had suffered agonies of apprehension, for all of which he blamed Scaramouche so bitterly that not even the ultimate success—almost miraculous when all the elements are considered—could justify his partner in his eyes.

And now, to find himself, in addition, ignored by this company—his own company, which he had so laboriously and slowly assembled and selected among the men of ability whom he had found here and there in the dregs of cities—was something that stirred his bile and aroused the malevolence that never did more than slumber in him. But deeply though his rage was moved, it did not blind him to the folly of betraying it. Yet that he should assert himself in this hour was imperative, unless he were for ever to become a thing of no account in this troupe over which he had lorded it for long months before this interloper came amongst them to fill his purse and destroy his authority.

So he stepped forward now when Polichinelle had done. His make-up assisting him to mask his bitter feelings, he professed to add his own to Polichinelle's acclamations of his dear partner. But he did it in such a manner as to make it clear that what Scaramouche had done, he had done by M. Binet's favour, and that in all M. Binet's had been the guiding hand. In associating himself with Polichinelle, he desired to thank Scaramouche, much in the manner of a lord rendering thanks to his steward for services diligently rendered and orders scrupulously carried out.

It neither deceived the troupe nor mollified himself. Indeed his consciousness of the mockery of it but increased his bitterness. But at least it saved his face and rescued him from nullity—he who was their chief

To say, as I have said, that it did not deceive them, is perhaps to say too much, for it deceived them at least on the score of his feelings. They believed, after discounting the insinuations in which he took all credit to himself, that at heart he was filled with gratitude as they were. That belief was shared by André-Louis himself, who in his brief, grateful answer was very generous to M. Binet, more than endorsing the claims that M. Binet had made.

And then followed from him the announcement that their success in Nantes was the sweeter to him because it rendered almost immediately attainable the dearest wish of his heart, which was to make Climène his wife. It was a felicity of which he was the first to acknowledge his utter unworthiness. It was to bring him into still closer relations with his good friend M. Binet, to whom he owed all that he had achieved for himself and for them. The announcement was joyously received, for the world of the theatre loves a lover as dearly as does the greater world. So they acclaimed the happy pair, with the exception of poor Léandre, whose eyes were more melancholy than ever.

They were a happy family that night in the upstairs room of their inn on the Quai La Fosse—the same inn from which André-Louis had set out some weeks ago to play a vastly different rôle before an audience of Nantes. Yet was it so different? he wondered. Had he not, then, been a sort of Scaramouche—an intriguer, glib and specious, deceiving folk, cynically misleading them with opinions that were not really his own? Was it at all surprising that he should have made so rapid and signal a success as a mime? Was not this really all that he had ever been, the thing for which nature had designed him?

On the following night they played 'The Shy Lover' to a full house, the fame of their début having gone abroad, and the success of Monday was confirmed. On Wednesday they gave 'Figaro-Scaramouche,' and on Thursday morning the *Courrier Nantais* came out with an article of more than a column of praise of these brilliant improvisers, for whom it claimed that they utterly put to shame the mere reciters of memorised parts.

André-Louis, reading the sheet at breakfast, and having no delusions on the score of the falseness of that statement, laughed inwardly. The novelty of the thing, and the pretentiousness in which he had swaddled it, had deceived them finely. He turned to greet Binet and Climène, who entered at that moment. He waved the sheet above his head.

"It is settled," he announced, "we stay in Nantes until Easter."

"Do we?" said Binet, sourly. "You settle everything, my friend."

"Read for yourself." And he handed him the paper.

Moodily M. Binet read. He set the sheet down in silence, and turned his attention to his breakfast.

"Was I justified or not?" quoth André-Louis, who found M. Binet's behaviour a thought intriguing.

"In what?"

"In coming to Nantes?"

"If I had not thought so, we should not have come," said Binet, and he began to eat.

André-Louis dropped the subject, wondering.

After breakfast, he and Climène sallied forth to take the air upon the quays. It was a day of brilliant sunshine, less cold than it had lately been. Columbine tactlessly joined them as they were setting out, though in this respect matters were improved a little when Harlequin came running after them and attached himself to Columbine.

André-Louis stepping out ahead with Climène, spoke of the thing that was uppermost in his mind at the moment.

"Your father is behaving very oddly towards me," said he. "It is almost as if he had suddenly become hostile."

"You imagine it," said she. "My father is very grateful to you, as we all are."

"He is anything but grateful. He is infuriated against me, and I think I know the reason. Don't you? Can't you guess?"

"I can't indeed."

"If you were my daughter, Climène, which God be thanked you are not, I should feel aggrieved against the man who carried you away from me. Poor old Pantaloon! He called me a corsair when I told him that I intend to marry you."

"He was right. You are a bold robber, Scaramouche."

"It is in the character," said he. "Your father believes in having his mimes play upon the stage the parts that suit their natural temperaments."

"Yes, you take everything you want, don't you?" She looked up at him, half adoringly, half-shyly.

"If it is possible," said he. "I took his consent to our marriage by main force from him. I never waited for him to give it. When, in fact, he refused it, I just snatched it from him, and I'll defy him now to win it back from me. I think that is what he most resents."

She laughed, and launched upon an animated answer. But he did not hear a word of it. Through the bustle of traffic

on the quay a cabriolet, the upper half of which was a most entirely made of glass, had approached them. It was drawn by two magnificent bay horses and driven by a superbly liveried coachman.

In the cabriolet alone sat a slight young girl wrapped in a lynx-fur pelisse, her face of a delicate loveliness. She was leaning forward, her lips parted, her eyes devouring Scaramouche until they drew his gaze. When that happened the shock of it brought him abruptly to a dumbfounded halt.

Climène, checking in the middle of a sentence arrested by his own sudden stopping, plucked at his sleeve.

"What is it, Scaramouche?"

But he made no attempt to answer her, and at that moment, the coachman to whom the little lady had already signalled, brought the carriage to a standstill beside them. Seen in the gorgeous setting of that coach, with its escutcheoned panels, its portly coachman, and its white-stockinged footman—who swung instantly to earth as the vehicle stopped—its dainty occupant seemed to Climène a princess out of a fairy-tale. And this princess, leaning forward, with eyes aglow and cheeks aflush, stretched out a choicely-gloved hand to Scaramouche

"André-Louis!" she called him.

And Scaramouche took the hand of that exalted being, just as he might have taken the hand of Climène herself, and with eyes that reflected the gladness of her own, in a voice that echoed the joyous surprise of hers, he addressed her familiarly by name, just as she had addressed him

"Aline!"

CHAPTER VIII

THE DREAM

"The door." Aline commanded her footman, and "Mount here beside me" she commanded André-Louis, in the same breath.

"A moment, Aline."

He turned to his companion, who was all amazement, and to Harlequin and Columbine, who had that moment come up to share it. "You permit me, Climène?" said he, breathlessly. But it was more a statement than a question. "Fortunately you are not alone. Harlequin will take care of you. Au revoir at dinner."

With that he sprang into the cabriolet without waiting for a reply. The footman closed the door, the coachman cracked his whip, and the regal equipage rolled away along the quay, leaving the three comedians staring after it, open-mouthed. Then Harlequin laughed.

"A prince in disguise, our Scaramouche!" said he.

Columbine clapped her hands and flashed her strong teeth. "But what a romance for you, Climène! How wonderful!"

The frown melted from Climène's brow. Resentment changed to bewilderment.

"But who is she?"

"His sister, of course," said Harlequin, quite definitely.

"His sister? How do you know?"

"I know what he will tell you on his return."

"But why?"

"Because you wouldn't believe him if he said she was his mother."

Following the carriage with their glance they wandered on in the direction it had taken. And in the carriage Aline was considering André-Louis with grave eyes, lips slightly compressed and a tiny frown between her finely-drawn eyebrows.

"You have taken to queer company, André," was the first thing she said to him. "Or else I am mistaken in thinking that your companion was Mademoiselle Binet of the Théâtre Feydau."

"You are not mistaken. But I had not imagined Mademoiselle Binet so famous already."

"Oh, as to that . . ." Mademoiselle shrugged, her tone quietly scornful. And she explained. "It is simply that I was at the play last night. I thought I recognised her."

"You were at the Feydau last night? And I never saw you!"

"Were you there, too?"

"Was I there?" he cried. Then he checked, and abruptly changed his tone. "Oh yes, I was there," he said, as commonplace as he could, beset by a sudden reluctance to avow that he had so willingly descended to depths that she must account unworthy, and grateful that his disguise of face and voice should have proved impenetrable even to one who knew him so very well.

"I understand," said she, and compressed her lips a little more tightly.

"But what do you understand?"

"The rare attractions of Mademoiselle Binet. Naturally you would be at the theatre. Your tone conveyed it very

clearly. Do you know that you disappoint me, André? It is stupid of me, perhaps; it betrays, I suppose, my imperfect knowledge of your sex. I am aware that most young men of fashion find an irresistible attraction for creatures who parade themselves upon the stage. But I did not expect you to ape the ways of a man of fashion. I was foolish enough to imagine you to be different; rather above such trivial pursuits. I conceived you something of an idealist."

"Sheer flattery!"

"So I perceive. But you misled me. You talked so much morality of a kind, you made philosophy so readily, that I came to be deceived. In fact, your hypocrisy was so consummate that I never suspected it. With your gift of acting, I wonder that you haven't joined Mademoiselle Binet's troupe."

"I have," said he.

It had really become necessary to tell her, making choice of the lesser of the two evils with which she confronted him.

He saw first incredulity, then consternation, and lastly disgust overspread her face.

"Of course," said she, after a long pause, "that would have the advantage of bringing you closer to your charmer."

"That was only one of the inducements. There was another. Finding myself forced to choose between the stage and the gallows I had the incredible weakness to prefer the former. It was utterly unworthy of a man of my lofty ideals, but—what would you? Like other ideologists, I find it easier to preach than to practise. Shall I stop the carriage and remove the contamination of my disgusting person? Or shall I tell you how it happened?"

"Tell me how it happened first. Then we will decide."

He told her how he met the Binet troupe, and how the men of the *maréchaussée* forced upon him the discovery that in its bosom he could lie safely lost until the hue-and-cry had died down.

The explanation dissolved her iciness.

"My poor André, why didn't you tell me this at first?"

"For one thing you didn't give me time; for another I feared to shock you with the spectacle of my degradation."

She took him seriously. "But where was the need of it? And why did you not send us word, as I required you, of your whereabouts?"

"I was thinking of it only yesterday. I have hesitated for several reasons."

"You thought it would offend us to know what you were doing?"

"I think that I preferred to surprise you by the magnitude of my ultimate achievements."

"Oh, you are to become a great actor?" She was frankly scornful.

"That is not impossible. But I am more concerned to become a great author. There is no reason why you should sniff. The calling is an honourable one. All the world is proud to know such men as Beaumarchais and Chénier."

"And you hope to equal them?"

"I hope to surpass them, whilst acknowledging that it was they who taught me how to walk. What did you think of the play last night?"

"It was amusing and well conceived."

"Let me present you to the author."

"You? But the company is one of the improvisers."

"Even improvisers require an author to write their scenarios. That is all I write at present. Soon I shall be writing plays in the modern manner."

"You deceive yourself, my poor André. The piece last night would have been nothing without the players. You are fortunate in your Scaramouche."

"In confidence—I present you to him."

"You—Scaramouche? You?" She turned to regard him fully. He smiled his close-lipped smile that made wrinkles like gashes in his cheeks. He nodded.

"And I didn't recognise you?"

"I thank you for the tribute. You imagined, of course, that I was a scene-shifter. And now that you know all about me, what of Gavrillac? What of my godfather?"

He was well, she told him, and still profoundly indignant with André-Louis for his defection, whilst secretly concerned on his behalf.

"I shall write him to-day that I have seen you."

"Do so. Tell him that I am well and prospering. But say no more. Do not tell him what I am doing. He has his prejudices, too. Besides, it might not be prudent. And now the question I have been burning to ask ever since I entered your carriage. Why are you in Nantes, Aline?"

"I am on a visit to my aunt, Madame de Sautron. It was with her that I came to the play yesterday. We have been dull at the château; but it will be different now. Madame my aunt is receiving several guests to-day. M. de La Tour d'Azyr is to be amongst them."

André-Louis frowned and sighed. "Did you ever hear, Aline, how poor Philippe de Vilmorin came by his end?"

"Yes; I was told first by my uncle, then by M. de La Tour d'Azyr himself."

"Did not that help you to decide this marriage question?"

"How could it? You forget that I am but a woman. You don't expect me to judge between men in matters such as these?"

"Why not? You are well able to do so. The more since you have heard two sides. For my godfather would tell you the truth. If you cannot judge, it is that you do not wish to judge." His tone became harsh. "Wilfully you close your eyes to justice that might check the curse of your unhealthy, unnatural ambition."

"Excellent!" she exclaimed, and considered him with amusement and something else. "Do you know that you are almost droll? You rise unblushing from the dregs of life in which I find you, shake off the arm of that theatre girl and come to preach to me."

"If these were the dregs of life I might still speak from them to counsel you out of my respect and devotion, Aline." He was very stiff and stern. "But they are not the dregs of life. Honour and virtue are possible to a theatre girl, they are impossible to a lady who sells herself to gratify ambition; for who position riches, and a great title barter herself in marriage."

She looked at him breathlessly. Anger turned her pale. She reached for the cord.

"I think I had better let you alight so that you may go back to practise virtue and honour with your theatre wench."

"You shall not speak so of her, Aline."

"Faith, now we are to have heat on her behalf. You think I am too delicate? You think I should speak of her as . . ."

"If you must speak of her at all," he interrupted, hotly, "you'll speak of her as my wife."

Amazement smothered her anger. Her pallor deepened.

"My God!" she said, and looked at him in horror. And in horror she asked him presently, "You are married—married to that . . .?"

"Not yet. But I shall be soon. And let me tell you that this girl whom you visit with your ignorant contempt is as good and pure as you are, Aline. She has wit and talent which have placed her where she is and shall carry her a deal farther. And she has the womanliness to be guided by natural instincts in the selection of her mate."

She was trembling with passion. She tugged the cord.

"You will descend this instant," she told him mercely.

That you should dare to make a comparison between me and that

"And my wife-to-be," he interrupted, before she could speak the infamous word. He opened the door for himself without waiting for the footman, and leapt down. "My compliments," said he, furiously, "to the assassin you are to marry." He slammed the door. "Drive on," he bade the coachman.

The carriage rolled away up the Faubourg Gigan, leaving him standing where he had alighted, quivering with rage. Gradually, as he walked back to the inn, his anger cooled. Gradually as he cooled, he perceived her point of view and in the end forgave her. It was not her fault that she thought as she thought. Her rearing had been such as to make her look upon every actress as a trull, just as it had qualified her calmly to consider the monstrous marriage of convenience into which she was invited.

He got back to the inn to find the company at table.

Silence fell when he entered, so suddenly that of necessity it must be supposed he was himself the subject of the conversation. Harlequin and Columbine had spread the tale of this prince in disguise caught up into the chariot of a princess and carried off by her; and it was a tale that had lost nothing in the telling.

Climène had been silent and thoughtful, pondering what Columbine had called this romance of hers. Clearly her Scaramouche must be vastly other than he had hitherto appeared, or else that great lady and he would never have used such familiarity with each other. Imagining him no better than he was, Climène had made him her own. And now she was to receive the reward of disinterested affection.

Even old Binet's secret hostility towards André-Louis melted before this astounding revelation. He had pinched his daughter's ear quite playfully. "Ah, ah, trust you to have penetrated his disguise, my child!"

She shrank resentfully from that implication.

"But I did not," she said. "I took him for what he seemed."

Her father winked at her very solemnly and laughed. "To be sure you did. But like your father, who was once a gentleman, and knows the ways of gentlemen, you detected in him a subtle something different from those with whom misfortune has compelled you hitherto to herd. You knew as well as I did that he never caught that trick of haughtiness, that grand air of command, in a lawyer's musty office, and that his speech had hardly the ring or his thoughts the complexion of the bourgeois

that he pretended to be. And it was shrewd of you to have made him yours. Do you know that I shall be very proud of you yet, Climène ? ”

She moved away without answering. Her father's oiliness offended her. Scaramouche was clearly a great gentleman ; an eccentric, if you please, but a man born. And she was to be his lady. Her father must learn to treat her differently.

She looked shyly—with a new shyness—at her lover when he came into the room where they were dining. She observed for the first time that proud carriage of the head, with the chin thrust forward, that was a trick of his, and she noticed with what a grace he moved—the grace of one who in youth has had his dancing-masters and fencing-masters.

It almost hurt her when he flung himself into a chair and exchanged a quip with Harlequin in the usual manner as with an equal, and it offended her still more that Harlequin, knowing what he now knew, should use him with the same unbecoming familiarity

CHAPTER IX

THE AWAKENING

“ Do you know,” said Climène, “ that I am waiting for the explanation which I think you owe me ? ”

They were alone together, lingering still at the table to which André-Louis had come belatedly, and André-Louis was loading himself a pipe. Of late—since joining the Binet Troupe—he had acquired the habit of smoking. The others had gone, some to take the air, and others, like Binet and Madame, because they felt that it was discreet to leave those two to the explanations that must pass. It was a feeling that André-Louis did not share. He kindled a light, and leisurely applied it to his pipe. A frown came to settle on his brow.

“ Explanation ? ” he questioned, presently, and looked at her. “ But on what score ? ”

“ On the score of the deception you have practised on us—on me.”

“ I have practised none,” he assured her.

“ You mean that you have simply kept your own counsel, and that in silence there is no deception ? But it is deceitful to withhold facts concerning yourself and your true station from your future wife. You should not have pretended to be a :

country lawyer, which, of course, anyone could see that you are not. It may have been very romantic, but . . . *Enfin*, will you explain?"

"I see," he said, and pulled at his pipe. "But you are wrong, *Climène*. I have practised no deception. If there are things about me that I have not told you, it is that I did not account them of much importance. But I have never deceived you by pretending to be other than I am. I am neither more nor less than I have represented myself."

This persistence began to annoy her, and the annoyance showed on her winsome face, coloured her voice.

"Ha! And that fine lady of the nobility with whom you are so intimate, who carried you off in her cabriolet with so little ceremony towards myself! What is she to you?"

"A sort of sister," said he.

"A sort of sister!" She was indignant. "Harlequin foretold that you should say so; but he was amusing himself. It was not very funny. It is less funny still from you. She has a name, I suppose, this sort of sister."

"Certainly she has a name. She is *Mademoiselle Aline de Kercadiou*, the niece of *Quintin de Kercadiou*, Lord of *Gavrillac*."

"Oho! That's a sufficiently fine name for your sort of sister. What sort of sister, my friend?"

For the first time in their relationship, he observed and deplored the taint of vulgarity, of shrewishness, in her manner.

"It would have been more accurate in me to have said a sort of reputed left-handed cousin."

"A reputed left-handed cousin! And what sort of relationship may that be? Faith, you dazzle me with your lucidity."

"It requires to be explained."

"That is what I have been telling you. But you seem very reluctant with your explanations."

"Oh no. It is only that they are so unimportant. But be you the judge. Her uncle, *M. de Kercadiou*, is my godfather, and she and I have been playmates from infancy as a consequence. It is popularly believed in *Gavrillac* that *M. de Kercadiou* is my father. He has certainly cared for my rearing from my tenderest years, and it is entirely owing to him that I was educated at *Louis Le Grand*. I owe to him everything that I have—or, rather, everything that I had; for of my own free will I have cut myself adrift, and to-day I possess nothing save what I can earn for myself in the theatre or elsewhere."

She sat stunned and pale under that cruel blow to her swelling pride. Had he told her this but yesterday, it would have

made no impression upon her, it would have mattered not at all ; the event of to-day coming as a sequel would but have enhanced him in her eyes. But coming now, after her imagination had woven for him so magnificent a background, after the rashly assumed discovery of his splendid identity had made her the envied of all the company, after having been in her own eyes and theirs enshrined by marriage with him as a great lady, this disclosure crushed and humiliated her. Her prince in disguise was merely the outcast bastard of a country gentleman ! She would be the laughing-stock of every member of her father's troupe, of all those who had so lately envied her this romantic good fortune.

" You should have told me this before," she said, in a dull voice that she strove to render steady.

" Perhaps I should. But does it really matter ? "

" Matter ? " She suppressed her fury to ask another question. " You say that this M. de Kercadiou is popularly believed to be your father. What precisely do you mean ? "

" Just that. It is a belief that I do not share. It is a matter of instinct perhaps with me. Moreover, once I asked M. de Kercadiou point-blank, and I received from him a denial. It is not, perhaps, a denial to which one would attach too much importance in all the circumstances. Yet I have never known M. de Kercadiou for other than a man of strictest honour, and I should hesitate to disbelieve him—particularly when his statement leaps with my own instincts. He assured me that he did not know who my father was."

" And your mother, was he equally ignorant ? " She was sneering, but he did not remark it. Her back was to the light.

" He would not disclose her name to me. He confessed her to be a dear friend of his."

She startled him by laughing, and her laugh was not pleasant.

" A very dear friend, you may be sure, you simpleton. What name do you bear ? "

He restrained his own rising indignation to answer her question calmly " Moreau. It was given me, so I am told, from the Brittany village in which I was born. But I have no claim to it. In fact I have no name, unless it be Scaramouche, to which I have earned a title. So that you see, my dear," he ended with a smile " I have practised no deception whatever."

" No, no, I see that now." She laughed without mirth, then drew a deep breath and rose. " I am very tired," she said.

He was on his feet in an instant all solicitude. But she waved him wearily back.

" I think I will rest until it is time to go to the theatre.

She moved towards the door, dragging her feet a little. He sprang to open it, and she passed out without looking at him.

Her so brief romantic dream was ended. The glorious world of fancy which in the last hour she had built with such elaborate detail, over which it should be her exalted destiny to rule, lay shattered about her feet, its débris so many stumbling-blocks that prevented her from winning back to her erstwhile content in Scaramouche as he really was.

André-Louis sat in the window embrasure, smoking and looking idly out across the river. He was intrigued and meditative. He had shocked her. The fact was clear; not so the reason. That he should confess himself nameless should not particularly injure him in the eyes of a girl reared amid the surroundings that had been Climène's. And yet that his confession had so injured him was fully apparent.

There, still at his brooding, the returning Columbine discovered him a half-hour later.

"All alone, my prince!" was her laughing greeting, which suddenly threw light upon his mental darkness. Climène had been disappointed of hopes that the wild imagination of these players had suddenly erected upon the incident of his meeting with Aline. Poor child! He smiled whimsically at Columbine.

"I am likely to be so for some little time," said he, "until it becomes a commonplace that I am not, after all, a prince."

"Not a prince? Oh, but a duke, then—at least a marquis."

"Not even a chevalier unless it be of the order of fortune. I am just Scaramouche. My castles are all in Spain."

Disappointment clouded the lively good-natured face.

"And I had imagined you . . ."

"I know," he interrupted. "That is the mischief."

He might have gauged the extent of that mischief by Climène's conduct that evening towards the gentlemen of fashion who clustered now in the green-room between the acts to pay their homage to the incomparable amoureuse. Hitherto she had received them with a circumspection compelling respect. Tonight she was recklessly gay, impudent, almost wanton.

He spoke of it gently to her as they walked home together, counselling more prudence in the future.

"We are not married yet," she told him tartly. "Wait until then before you criticise my conduct."

"I trust that there will be no occasion then," said he.

"You trust? Ah, yes. You are very trusting."

"Climène, I have offended you. I am sorry."

"It is nothing," said she. "You are what you are."

Still was he not concerned. He perceived the source of

her ill-humour ; understood, whilst deploring it ; and, because he understood, forgave. He perceived also that her ill-humour was shared by her father, and by this he was frankly amused. Towards M. Binet a tolerant contempt was the only feeling that complete acquaintance could beget. As for the rest of the company, they were disposed to be very kindly towards Scaramouche. It was almost as if in reality he had fallen from the high estate to which their own imaginations had raised him ; or possibly it was because they saw the effect which that fall from his temporary and fictitious elevation had produced upon Climène.

Léandre alone made himself an exception. His habitual melancholy seemed to be dispelled at last, and his eyes gleamed now with malicious satisfaction when they rested upon Scaramouche, whom occasionally he continued to address with sly mockery as " mon prince."

On the morrow André-Louis saw but little of Climène. This was not in itself extraordinary, for he was very hard at work again, with preparations now for ' Figaro-Scaramouche ' which was to be played on Saturday. Also, in addition to his manifold theatrical occupations, he now devoted an hour every morning to the study of fencing in an academy of arms. This was done not only to repair an omission in his education, but also, and chiefly, to give him added grace and poise upon the stage. He found his mind that morning distracted by thoughts of both Climène and Aline. And, oddly enough, it was Aline who provided the deeper perturbation. Climène's attitude he regarded as a passing phase which need not seriously engage him. But the thought of Aline's conduct towards him kept rankling, and still more deeply rankled the thought of her possible betrothal to M. de La Tour d'Azyr.

This it was that brought forcibly to his mind the self-imposed but by now half-forgotten mission that he had made his own. He had boasted that he would make the voice which M. de La Tour d'Azyr had sought to silence ring through the length and breadth of the land. And what had he done of all this that he had boasted ? He had incited the mob of Rennes and the mob of Nantes in such terms as poor Philippe might have employed and then because of a hue-and-cry he had fled like a cut and taken shelter in the first kennel that offered, there to lie quiet and devote himself to other things—self-seeking things. What a fine contrast between the promise and the fulfilment !

Thus André-Louis to himself in his self-contempt. And whilst he trifled away his time and played Scaramouche, and centred all his hopes in presently becoming the rival of such

men as Chénier and Mercier, M. de La Tour d'Azyr went his proud ways unchallenged and wrought his will. It was idle to tell himself that the seed he had sown was bearing fruit. That the demands he had voiced in Nantes for the Third Estate had been granted by M. Neckcr, thanks largely to the commotion which his anonymous speech had made. That was not his concern or his mission. It was no part of his concern to set about the regeneration of mankind, or even the regeneration of the social structure of France. His concern was to see that M. de La Tour d'Azyr paid to the uttermost liard for the brutal wrong he had done Philippe de Vilmorin. And it did not increase his self-respect to find that the danger in which Aline stood of being married to the Marquis was the real spur to his rancour and to remembrance of his vow. He was—too unjustly perhaps—disposed to dismiss as mere sophistries his own arguments that there was nothing he could do ; that, in fact, he had but to show his head to find himself going to Rennes under arrest and making his final exit from the world's stage by way of the gallows.

It is impossible to read that part of his "Confessions" without feeling a certain pity for him. You realise what must have been his state of mind. You realise what a prey he was to emotions so conflicting, and if you have the imagination that will enable you to put yourself in his place, you will also realise how impossible was any decision save the one to which he says he came, that he would move at the first moment that he perceived in what direction it would serve his real aims to move.

It happened that the first person he saw when he took the stage on that Thursday evening was Aline ; the second was the Marquis de La Tour d'Azyr. They occupied a box on the right of, and immediately above, the stage. There were others with them—notably a thin, elderly, resplendent lady whom André-Louis supposed to be Madame la Comtesse de Sautron. But at the time he had no eyes for any but those two, who of late had so haunted his thoughts. The sight of either of them would have been sufficiently disconcerting. The sight of both together very nearly made him forget the purpose for which he had come upon the stage. Then he pulled himself together, and played. He played, he says, with an unusual verve, and never in all that brief but eventful career of his was he more applauded.

That was the evening's first shock. The next came after the second act. Entering the green-room, he found it more thronged than usual, and at the far end with Climène, over whom he was bending from his fine height, his eyes intent upon her face, what time his smiling lips moved in talk, M. de La Tou

d'Azyr. He had her entirely to himself, a privilege non of the men of fashion who were in the habit of visiting the coulisses had yet enjoyed. Those lesser gentlemen had withdrawn before the Marquis, as jackals withdraw before the lion.

André-Louis stared a moment, stricken. Then recovering from his surprise he became critical in his study of the Marquis. He considered the beauty and grace and splendour of him. his courtly air, his complete and unshakable self-possession. But more than all, he considered the expression of the dark eyes that were devouring Climène's lovely face, and his own lips tightened.

M. de La Tour d'Azyr never heeded him or his stare ; nor had he done so would he have known who it was that looked at him from behind the make-up of Scaramouche ; nor, again, had he known, would he have been in the least troubled or concerned.

André-Louis sat down apart, his mind in turmoil. Presently he found a mincing young gentleman addressing him, and made shift to answer as was expected. Climène having been thus sequestered, and Columbine being already thickly besieged by gallants, the lesser visitors had to content themselves with Madame and the male members of the troupe. Monsieur Binet, indeed, was the centre of a gay cluster that shook with laughter at his sallies. He seemed of a sudden to have emerged from the gloom of the last two days into high good-humour, and Scaramouche observed how persistently his eyes kept flickering upon his daughter and her splendid courtier.

That night there were high words between André-Louis and Climène, the high words proceeding from Climène. When André-Louis again, and more insistently, enjoined prudence upon his betrothed, and begged her to beware how far she encouraged the advances of such a man as M. de La Tour d'Azyr, she became roundly abusive. She shocked and stunned him by her virulently shrewish tone, and her still more unexpected force of invective.

He sought to reason with her, and finally she came to certain terms with him.

"If you have become betrothed to me simply to stand as an obstacle in my path, the sooner we make an end the better."

"You do not love me then, Climène ?"

"Love has nothing to do with it. I'll not tolerate your insensate jealousy. A girl in the theatre must make it her business to accept homage from all."

"Agreed ; and there is no harm provided she gives nothing in exchange."

White-faced, with flaming eyes, she turned on him at that.

"Now what exactly do you mean?"

"My meaning is clear. A girl in your position may receive all the homage that is offered, provided she receives it with a dignified aloofness implying clearly that she has no favours to bestow in return beyond the favour of her smile. If she is wise she will see to it, that the homage is always offered collectively by her admirers, and that no single one amongst them shall ever have the privilege of approaching her alone. If she is wise she will give no encouragement, nourish no hopes that it may afterwards be beyond her power to deny realisation."

"How! You dare?"

"I know my world. And I know M. de La Tour d'Azyr," he answered her. "He is a man without charity, without humanity almost; a man who takes what he wants wherever he finds it, and whether it is given willingly or not; a man who reckons nothing of the misery he scatters on his self-indulgent way: a man whose only law is force. Ponder it, Climène, and ask yourself if I do you less than honour in warning you."

He went out on that, feeling a degradation in continuing the subject.

The days that followed were unhappy days for him, and for at least one other. That other was Léandre, who was cast into the profoundest dejection by M. de La Tour d'Azyr's assiduous attendance upon Climène. The Marquis was to be seen at every performance; a box was perpetually reserved for him, and invariably he came either alone or else with his cousin, M. de Chabrilanne.

On Tuesday of the following week, André-Louis went out alone early in the morning. He was out of temper, fretted by an overwhelming sense of humiliation, and he hoped to clear his mind by walking. In turning the corner of the Place du Bouffay he ran into a slightly-built, sallow-complexioned gentleman very neatly dressed in black, wearing a tie-wig under a round hat. The man fell back at sight of him, levelling a spy-glass, then hailed him in a voice that rang with amazement.

"Moreau! Where the devil have you been hiding yourself these months?"

It was Le Chapelier, the lawyer, the leader of the Literary Chamber of Rennes.

"Behind the skirts of Thespis," said Scaramouche.

"I don't understand."

"I didn't intend that you should. What of yourself, Isaac. And what of the world, which seems to have been standing still of late?"

"Standing still!" Chapelier laughed. "But where have

you been, then? Standing still!" he pointed across the square to a café under the shadow of the gloomy prison. "Let us go and drink a bavaroise. You are of all men the man we want, the man we have been seeking everywhere, and—behold!—you drop from the skies into my path."

They crossed the square and entered the café.

"So you think the world has been standing still! Dieu de Dieu! I suppose you haven't heard of the royal order for the convocation of the States General, or the terms of them—that we are to have what we demanded, what you demanded for us here in Nantes? You haven't heard that the order has gone forth for the primary elections—the elections of the electors? You haven't heard of the fresh uproar in Rennes last month? The order was that the three Estates should sit together at the States General of the bailliages, but in the bailliage of Rennes the nobles must ever be recalcitrant. They took up arms actually—six hundred of them with their valetaille, headed by your old friend M. de La Tour d'Azyr, and they were for slashing us—the members of the Third Estate—into ribbons, so as to put an end to our insolence." He laughed delicately. "But, by God, we showed them that we, too, could take up arms. It was what you yourself advocated here in Nantes, last November. We fought them a pitched battle in the streets, under the leadership of your namesake Moreau, the provost, and we so peppered them that they were glad to take shelter in the Cordelier Convent. That is the end of their resistance to the royal authority and the people's will."

He ran on at great speed detailing the events that had taken place, and finally came to the matter which had, he announced, been causing him to hunt for André-Louis until he had all but despaired of finding him.

Nantes was sending fifty delegates to the assembly of Rennes, which was to select the deputies to the Third Estate and edit their cahier of grievances. Rennes itself was being as fully represented whilst such villages as Gavrillac were sending two delegates for every two hundred hearths or less. Each of these three had clamoured that André-Louis Moreau should be one of its delegates. Gavrillac wanted him because he belonged to the village and it was known there what sacrifices he had made in the popular cause; Rennes wanted him because it had heard his spirited address on the day of the shooting of the students; and Nantes—to whom his identity was unknown—asked for him as the speaker who had addressed them under the name of *Omnēs Omnibus* and who had framed for them the memorial that was believed so largely to have

influenced M. Necker in formulating the terms of the convocation.

Since he could not be found, the delegations had been made up without him. But now, it happened that one or two vacancies had occurred in the Nantes representation; and it was the business of filling these vacancies that had brought Le Chapelier to Nantes.

André-Louis firmly shook his head in answer to Le Chapelier's proposal.

"You refuse?" the other cried. "Are you mad? Refuse, when you are demanded from so many sides? Do you realise that it is more than probable you will be elected one of the deputies, that you will be sent to the States General at Versailles to represent us in this work of saving France?"

But André-Louis, we know, was not concerned to save France. At the moment he was concerned to save two women, both of whom he loved, though in vastly different ways, from a man he had vowed to ruin. He stood firm in his refusal until Le Chapelier dejectedly abandoned the attempt to persuade him.

"It is odd," said André-Louis, "that I should have been so deeply immersed in trifles as never to have perceived that Nantes is being politically active."

"Active? My friend, it is a seething cauldron of political emotions. It is kept quiet on the surface only by the persuasion that all goes well. At a hint to the contrary it would boil over."

"Would it so?" said Scaramouche, thoughtfully. "The knowledge may be useful." And then he changed the subject. "You know that La Tour d'Azyr is here?"

"In Nantes? He has courage if he shows himself. They are not a docile people, these Nantais, and they know his record and the part he played in the rising at Rennes. I marvel they haven't stoned him. But they will, sooner or later. It only needs that someone should suggest it."

"That is very likely," said André-Louis, and smiled. "He doesn't show himself much; not in the streets at least. So that he has not the courage you suppose; nor any kind of courage as I told him once. He has only insolence."

At parting Le Chapelier again exhorted him to give thought to what he proposed. "Send me word if you change your mind. I am lodged at the Cerf, and I shall be here until the day after to-morrow. If you have ambition, this is your moment."

"I have no ambition, I suppose," said André-Louis, and went his way.

That night, at the theatre, he had a mischievous impulse to test what Le Chapelier had told him of the state of public feeling in the city. They were playing 'The Terrible Captain,' in the last act of which the empty cowardice of the bullying braggart Rhodomont is revealed by Scaramouche.

After the laughter which the exposure of the roaring captain invariably produced, it remained for Scaramouche contemptuously to dismiss him in a phrase that varied nightly, according to the inspiration of the moment. This time he chose to give his phrase a political complexion.

"Thus, O thrasonical coward, is your emptiness exposed. Because of your long length, and the great sword you carry, and the angle at which you cock your hat, people have gone in fear of you, have believed in you, have imagined you to be as terrible and as formidable as you insolently make yourself appear. But at the first touch of true spirit you crumple up, you tremble, you whine pitifully, and the great sword remains in your scabbard. You remind me of the Privileged Orders when confronted by the Third Estate."

It was audacious of him and he was prepared for anything—a laugh, applause, indignation, or all together. But he was not prepared for what came. And it came so suddenly and spontaneously from the groundlings and the body of those in the amphitheatre that he was almost scared by it—as a boy may be scared who has held a match to a sun-scorched hayrick. It was a hurricane of furious applause. Men leapt to their feet, sprang up on to the benches waving their hats in the air, deafening him with the terrific uproar of their acclamations. And it rolled on and on, nor ceased until the curtain fell.

Scaramouche stood meditatively smiling with tight lips. At the last moment he had caught a glimpse of M. de La Tour d'Azyr's face thrust farther forward than usual from the shadows of his box, and it was a face set in anger, with eyes on fire.

"Mon Dieu!" laughed Rhodomont, recovering from the real scare that had succeeded his histrionic terror, "but you have a great trick of tickling them in the right place, Scaramouche."

Scaramouche looked up at him and smiled. "It can be useful upon occasion," said he, and went off to his dressing-room to change.

But a reprimand awaited him. He was delayed at the theatre by matters concerned with the scenery of the new piece they were to mount upon the morrow. By the time he was rid of the business the rest of the company had long since left. He called a chair and had himself carried back to the inn in solitary state. It was one of many minor luxuries

his comparatively affluent present circumstances permitted.

Coming into that upstairs room that was common to all the troupe, he found M. Binet talking loudly and vehemently. He had caught sounds of his voice whilst yet upon the stairs. As he entered Binet broke off short and wheeled to face him.

"You are here at last!" It was so odd a greeting that André-Louis did no more than look his mild surprise. "I await your explanations of the disgraceful scene you provoked to-night."

"Disgraceful? Is it disgraceful that the public should applaud me?"

"The public? The rabble, you mean. Do you want to deprive us of the patronage of all gentlefolk by vulgar appeals to the low passions of the mob?"

André-Louis stepped past M. Binet, and forward to the table. He shrugged contemptuously. The man offended him after all.

"You exaggerate grossly—as usual."

"I do not exaggerate. And I am the master in my own theatre. This is the Binet Troupe, and it shall be conducted in the Binet way."

"Who are the gentlefolk, the loss of whose patronage to the Feydau will be so poignantly felt?" asked André-Louis.

"You imply that there are none? See how wrong you are. After the play to-night M. le Marquis de La Tour d'Azyr came to me, and spoke to me in the severest terms about your scandalous outburst. I was forced to apologise, and . . ."

"The more fool you" said André-Louis. "A man who respected himself would have shown that gentleman the door." M. Binet's face began to empurple. "You call yourself the head of the Binet Troupe, you boast that you will be master in your own theatre, and you stand like a lackey to take the orders of the first insolent fellow who comes to your green-room to tell you that he does not like a line spoken by one of your company! I say again that had you really respected yourself you would have turned him out."

There was a murmur of approval from several members of the company who having heard the arrogant tone assumed by the Marquis were filled with resentment against the slur cast upon them all.

"And I say further," André-Louis went on "that a man who respects himself on quite other grounds, would have been only too glad to have seized this pretext to show M. de La Tour d'Azyr the door."

"What do you mean by that?" There was a rumble of thunder in the question.

André-Louis's eyes swept round the company assembled at the supper-table. "Where is Climène?" he asked sharply.

Léandre leapt up to answer him, white in the face, tense and quivering with excitement.

"She left the theatre in the Marquis de La Tour d'Azyr's carriage immediately after the performance. We heard him offer to drive her to this inn."

André-Louis glanced at the time-piece on the overmantel. He seemed unnaturally calm.

"That would be an hour—rather more. And she has not yet arrived?"

His eyes sought M. Binet's. M. Binet's eyes eluded his glance. Again it was Léandre who answered him.

"Not yet."

"Ah!" André-Louis sat down, and poured himself wine. There was an oppressive silence in the room. Léandre watched him expectantly, Columbine commiseratingly. Even M. Binet appeared to be waiting for a cue from Scaramouche. But Scaramouche disappointed him. "Have you left me anything to eat?" he asked.

Platters were pushed towards him. He helped himself calmly to food, and ate in silence, apparently with a good appetite. M. Binet sat down, poured himself wine, and drank. Presently he attempted to make conversation with one and another. He was answered curtly, in monosyllables. M. Binet did not appear to be in favour with his troupe that night.

At long length came a rumble of wheels below and a rattle of halting hooves. Then voices, the high trilling laugh of Climène floating upwards. André-Louis went on eating unconcernedly.

"What an actor!" said Harlequin, under his breath to Polichinelle, and Polichinelle nodded gloomily.

She came in, a leading lady taking the stage, head high, chin thrust forward, eyes dancing with laughter; she expressed triumph and arrogance. Her cheeks were flushed, and there was some disorder in the mass of nut-brown hair that crowned her head. In her left hand she carried an enormous bouquet of white camelias. On its middle finger a diamond of great price drew almost at once by its effulgence the eyes of all.

Her father sprang to meet her with an unusual display of paternal tenderness. "At last, my child!"

He conducted her to the table. She sank into a chair, a little wearily, a little nervously, but the smile did not leave her

face, not even when she glanced across at Scaramouche. It was only Léandre, observing her closely, with hungry scowling stare, who detected something as of fear in the hazel eyes momentarily seen between the fluttering of her lids.

André-Louis, however, still went on eating stolidly, without so much as a look in her direction. Gradually the company came to realise that just as surely as a scene was brooding, just so surely would there be no scene as long as they remained. It was Polichinelle, at last, who gave the signal by rising and withdrawing, and within two minutes none remained in the room but M. Binet, his daughter, and André-Louis. And then at last, André-Louis set down knife and fork, washed his throat with a draught of Burgundy, and sat back in his chair to consider Climène.

"I trust," said he, "that you had a pleasant ride, mademoiselle."

"Most pleasant, monsieur." Impudently she strove to emulate his coolness, but did not completely succeed.

"And not unprofitable, if I may judge that jewel at this distance. It should be worth at least a couple of hundred louis, and that is a formidable sum even to so wealthy a nobleman as M. de La Tour d'Azyr. Would it be impertinent in one who has had some notion of becoming your husband to ask you, mademoiselle, what you have given him in return?"

M. Binet uttered a gross laugh, a queer mixture of cynicism and contempt.

"I have given nothing," said Climène, indignantly.

"Ah! Then the jewel is in the nature of a payment in advance."

"My God, man, you're not decent!" M. Binet protested.

"Decent!" André-Louis's smouldering eyes turned to discharge upon M. Binet such a fulmination of contempt that the old scoundrel shifted uncomfortably in his chair. "Did you mention decency, Binet? Almost you made me lose my temper, which is a thing that I detest above all others." Slowly his glance returned to Climène, who sat with elbows on the table, her chin cupped in her palms, regarding him with something between scorn and defiance. "Mademoiselle," he said, slowly, "I desire you purely in your own interests to consider whither you are going."

"I am well able to consider it for myself, and to decide without advice from you, monsieur."

"And now you've got your answer," chuckled Binet. "I hope you like it."

André-Louis had paled a little; there was incredulity in

his great sombre eyes as they continued steadily to regard her. Of M. Binet he took no notice.

"Surely, mademoiselle, you cannot mean that willingly with open eyes and a full understanding of what you do, you would exchange an honourable wifehood for . . . for the thing that such men as M. de La Tour d'Azyr may have in store for you?"

M. Binet made a wide gesture, and swung to his daughter, "You hear him, the mealy-mouthed prude! Perhaps you'll believe at last that marriage with him would be the ruin of you. He would always be there—the inconvenient husband—to mar your every chance, my girl."

She tossed her lovely head in agreement with her father. "I begin to find him tiresome with his silly jealousies," she confessed. "As a husband, I am afraid he would be impossible."

André-Louis felt a constriction of the heart. But—always the actor—he showed nothing of it. He laughed a little, not very pleasantly, and rose.

"I bow to your choice, mademoiselle. I pray that you may not regret it."

"Regret it?" cried M. Binet. He was laughing, relieved to see his daughter at last rid of this suitor of whom he had never approved, if we except those few hours when he really believed him to be an eccentric of distinction. "And what shall she regret? That she accepted the protection of a nobleman so powerful and wealthy that as a mere trinket he gives her a jewel worth as much as an actress earns in a year at the Comédie Française?" He got up, and advanced towards André-Louis. His mood became conciliatory. "Come, come, my friend, no rancour now. What the devil! You wouldn't stand in the girl's way? You can't really blame her for making this choice? Have you thought what it means to her? Have you thought that under the protection of such a gentleman there are no heights which she may not reach? Don't you see the wonderful luck of it? Surely if you're fond of her, particularly being of a jealous temperament, you wouldn't wish it otherwise?"

André-Louis looked at him in silence for a long moment. Then he laughed again. "Oh, you are fantastic," he said. "You are not real." He turned on his heel and strode to the door.

The action, and more the contempt of his look, laugh, and words, stung M. Binet to passion, drove out the conciliatoriness of his mood.

"Fantastic, are we?" he cried, turning to follow the departing Scaramouche with his little eyes that now were inexpressibly evil. "Fantastic that we should prefer the powerful

protection of this great nobleman to marriage with a beggarly nameless bastard. Oh, we are fantastic ! ”

André-Louis turned, his hand upon the door-handle. “ No,” he said “ I was mistaken. You are not fantastic. You are just vile—both of you.” And he went out.

CHAPTER X

CONTRITION

MADemoiselle DE KERCADIOU walked with her aunt in the bright morning sunshine of a Sunday in March on the broad terrace of the Château de Sautron.

For one of her natural sweetness of disposition she had been oddly irritable of late, manifesting signs of a cynical worldliness, which convinced Madame de Sautron more than ever that her brother Quintin had scandalously conducted the child's education. She appeared to be instructed in all the things of which a girl is better ignorant, and ignorant of all the things that a girl should know. That at least was the point of view of Madame de Sautron.

“ Tell me, madame,” quoth Aline, “ are all men beasts ? ”

Unlike her brother, Madame la Comtesse was tall and majestically built. In the days before her marriage with M. de Sautron, ill-natured folk described her as the only man in the family. She looked down now from her noble height upon her little niece with startled eyes.

“ Really, Aline, you have a trick of asking the most disconcerting and improper questions.”

“ Perhaps it is because I find life disconcerting and improper.”

“ Life ? A young girl should not discuss life.”

“ Why not, since I am alive ? You do not suggest that it is an impropriety to be alive ? ”

“ It is an impropriety for a young unmarried girl to seek to know too much about life. As for your absurd question about men, when I remind you that man is the noblest work of God, perhaps you will consider yourself answered.”

Madame de Sautron did not invite a pursuance of the subject. But Mademoiselle de Kercadiou's outrageous rearing had made her headstrong.

“ That being so,” said she, “ will you tell me why they find such an overwhelming attraction in the immodest of our sex ? ”

Madame stood still and raised shocked hands. Then she ooked down her handsome, high-bridged nose.

"Sometimes—often, in fact, my dear Aline—you pass all understanding. I shall write to Quintin that the sooner you are married the better it will be for all."

"Uncle Quintin has left that matter to my own deciding," Aline reminded her.

"That," said Madame, with complete conviction, "is the last and most outrageous of his errors. Whoever heard of a girl being left to decide the matter of her own marriage? It is . . . indelicate almost to expose her to thoughts of such things." Madame de Sautron shuddered. "Quintin is a boor. His conduct is unheard-of. That M. de La Tour d'Azyr should parade himself before you so that you may make up your mind whether he is the proper man for you!" Again she shuddered. "It is of a grossness, of . . . of a prurience almost . . . Mon Dieu! When I married your uncle, all this was arranged between our parents. I first saw him when he came to sign the contract. I should have died of shame had it been otherwise. And that is how these affairs should be conducted."

"You are no doubt right, madame. But since that is not how my own case is being conducted, you will forgive me if I deal with it apart from others. M. de La Tour d'Azyr desires to marry me. He has been permitted to pay his court. I should be glad to have him informed that he may cease to do so."

Madame de Sautron stood still, petrified by amazement. Her long face turned white; she seemed to breathe with difficulty.

"But . . . but . . . what are you saying?" she gasped.

Quietly Aline repeated her statement.

"But this is outrageous. You cannot be permitted to play fast-and-loose with a gentleman of M. le Marquis's quality. Why, it is little more than a week since you permitted him to be informed that you would become his wife!"

"I did so in a moment of . . . rashness. Since then M. le Marquis's own conduct has convinced me of my error."

"But—mon Dieu!" cried the Countess. "Are you blind to the great honour that is being paid you? M. le Marquis will make you the first lady in Brittany. Yet, little fool that you are, and greater fool that Quintin is, you trifle with this extraordinary good fortune. Let me warn you." She raised an admonitory forefinger. "If you continue in this stupid humour, M. de La Tour d'Azyr may definitely withdraw his offer, and depart in justified mortification."

"That, madame, as I am endeavouring to convey to you, is what I most desire."

"Oh, you are mad."

"It may be, madame, that I am sane in preferring to be guided by my instincts. It may be even that I am justified in resenting that the man who aspires to become my husband should at the same time be paying such assiduous homage to a wretched theatre-girl at the Feydau."

"Aline!"

"Is it not true? Or perhaps you do not find it strange that M. de La Tour d'Azyr should so conduct himself at such a time?"

"Aline, you are so extraordinary a mixture. At moments you shock me by the indecency of your expressions; at others you amaze me by the excess of your prudery. You have been brought up like a little bourgeoisie, I think. Yes, that is it—a little bourgeoisie. Quintin was always something of a shop-keeper at heart."

"I was asking your opinion on the conduct of M. de La Tour d'Azyr, madame. Not on my own."

"But it is an indelicacy in you to observe such things. You should be ignorant of them, and I can't think who is so . . . so unfeeling as to inform you. But since you are informed, at least you should be modestly blind to things that take place outside the . . . orbit of a properly conducted demoiselle."

"Will they still be outside my orbit when I am married?"

"If you are wise. You should remain without knowledge of them. It . . . it deflowers your innocence. I would not for the world that M. de La Tour d'Azyr should know you so extraordinarily instructed. Had you been properly reared in a convent this would never have happened to you."

"But you do not answer me, madame," cried Aline, in despair. "It is not my chastity that is in question, but that of M. de La Tour d'Azyr."

"Chastity!" Madame's lips trembled with horror. Horror overspread her face. "Wherever did you learn that dreadful, that so improper word?"

And then Madame de Sautron did violence to her feelings. She realised that here great calm and prudence were required. "My child since you know so much that you ought not to know, there can be no harm in my adding that a gentleman must have these little distractions."

"But why, madame? Why is it so?"

' Ah mon Dieu ! you are asking me riddles of Nature. It is so because it is so. Because men are like that.'

" Because men are beasts you mean—which is what I began by asking you."

" You are incorrigibly stupid Aline."

" You mean that I do not see things as you do, madame ? I am not over-expectant, as you appear to think ; yet surely I have the right to expect that whilst M. de La Tour d'Azyr is wooing me, he shall not be wooing at the same time a drab of the theatre. I feel that in this there is a subtle association of myself with that unspeakable creature, which soils and insults me. The Marquis is a dullard whose wooing takes the form, at best, of stilted compliments, stupid and unoriginal. They gain nothing when they fall from lips still warm from the contamination of that woman's kisses."

So utterly scandalised was Madame that for a moment she remained speechless. Then :

" Mon Dieu ! " she exclaimed. " I should never have suspected you of so indelicate an imagination."

" I cannot help it, madame. Each time his lips touch my fingers I find myself thinking of the last object that they touched. I at once retire to wash my hands. Next time, madame, unless you are good enough to convey my message to him I shall call for water and wash them in his presence."

" But what am I to tell him ? How . . . in what words, can I convey such a message ? " Madame was aghast.

" Be frank with him, madame. It is easiest in the end. Tell him that, however impure may have been his life in the past, however impure he intends that it shall be in the future, he must at least study purity whilst approaching with a view to marriage a virgin who is herself pure and without stain."

Madame recoiled, and put her hands to her ears, horror stamped on her handsome face. Her massive bosom heaved.

" Oh, how can you ? " she panted. " How can you make use of such terrible expressions ? Wherever have you learnt them ? "

" In church," said Aline

" Ah, but in church many things are said that . . . that one would not dream of saying in the world. My dear child, how could I possibly say such a thing to M. le Marquis ? How could I possibly ? "

" Shall I say it ? "

" Aline ! "

" Well, there it is," said Aline. " Something must be done to shelter me from insult. I am utterly disgusted with M.

le Marquis—a disgusting man. And however fine a thing it may be to become Marquise de La Tour d'Azyr—why, frankly, I'd sooner marry a cobbler who practised decency."

Such was her vehemence and obvious determination that Madame de Sautron fetched herself out of her despair to attempt persuasion. Aline was her niece, and such a marriage in the family would be to the credit of the whole of it. At all costs nothing must frustrate it.

"Listen, my dear," she said. "Let us reason. M. le Marquis is away and will not be back until to-morrow."

"True. And I know where he has gone—or at least whom he has gone with. Mon Dieu, and the drab has a father and a lout of a fellow who intends to make her his wife, and neither of them chooses to do anything. I suppose they agree with you, madame, that a great gentleman must have his little distractions." Her contempt was scorching as a thing of fire. "However, madame, you were about to say . . . ?"

"That on the day after to-morrow you are returning to Gavrillac. M. de La Tour d'Azyr will most likely follow at his leisure.

"You mean when this dirty candle is burnt out ?"

"Call it what you will." Madame, you see, despaired by now of controlling the impropriety of her niece's expressions. "At Gavrillac there will be no Mademoiselle Binet. This thing will be in the past. It is unfortunate that he should have met her at such a moment. The chit is very attractive, after all. You cannot deny that. And you must make allowances."

"M. le Marquis formally proposed to me a week ago. Partly to satisfy the wishes of the family, and partly . . ." she broke off, hesitating a moment, to resume on a note of dull pain, "partly because it does not seem greatly to matter whom I marry, I gave him my consent. That consent, for the reasons I have given you, madame, I desire now definitely to withdraw."

Madame fell into agitation of the wildest. "Aline, I should never forgive you. Your Uncle Quintin would be in despair. You do not know what you are saying, what a wonderful thing you are refusing. Have you no sense of your position, of the station into which you were born ?"

"If I had not, madame, I should have made an end long since. If I have tolerated this suit for a single moment it is because I realise the importance of a suitable marriage in the worldly sense. But I ask of marriage something more; and Uncle Quintin has placed the decision in my hands."

"God forgive him!" said Madame. And then she hurried

on. "Leave this to me now, Aline. Be guided by me—Oh, be guided by me!" Her tone was beseeching. "I will take council with your Uncle Charles. But do not definitely decide until this unfortunate affair has blown over. Charles will know how to arrange it. M. le Marquis shall do penance, child, since your tyranny demands it: but not in sackcloth and ashes. You'll not ask so much?"

Aline shrugged. "I ask nothing at all," she said, which was neither assent nor dissent.

So Madame de Sautron interviewed her husband, a slight, middle-aged man, very aristocratic in appearance and gifted with a certain shrewd sense. She took with him precisely the tone that Aline had taken with herself and which in Aline she had found so disconcertingly indelicate. She even borrowed several of Aline's phrases.

The result was that on the Monday afternoon, when at last M. de La Tour d'Azyr's returning berline drove up to the château he was met by M. le Comte de Sautron, who desired a word with him even before he changed.

"Gervais, you're a fool," was the excellent opening made by M. le Comte.

"Charles, you give me no news," answered M. le Marquis. "Of what particular folly do you take the trouble to complain?"

He flung himself wearily upon the sofa, and, his long graceful body sprawling there, he looked up at his friend with a tired smile on that nobly handsome pale face that seemed to defy the onslaught of age.

"Of your last. This Binet girl."

"That! Pooh! An incident; hardly a folly."

"A folly—at such a time," Sautron insisted. The Marquis looked a question. The Count answered it. "Aline," said he pregnantly. "She knows. How she knows I can't tell you, but she knows, and she is deeply offended."

The smile perished on the Marquis's face. He gathered himself up.

"Offended?" said he, and his voice was anxious.

"But yes. You know what she is. You know the ideals she has formed. It wounds her that at such a time, whilst you are here for the purpose of wooing her, you should at the same time be pursuing this affair with that chit of a Binet girl."

"How do you know?" asked La Tour d'Azyr.

"She has confided in her aunt. And the poor child seems to have some reason. She says she will not tolerate that you should come to kiss her hand with lips that are still contaminated from . . . Oh, you understand. You appreciate the

impression of such a thing upon a pure, sensitive girl such as Aline. She said—I had better tell you—that the next time you kiss her hand, she will call for water and wash it in your presence.”

The Marquis's face flamed scarlet. He rose. Knowing his violent, intolerant spirit, M. de Sautron was prepared for an outburst. But no outburst came.

The Marquis turned away from him, and paced slowly to the window, his head bowed, his hands behind his back. Halted there, he spoke without turning, and his voice was at once scornful and wistful.

“You are right, Charles, I am a fool—a wicked fool! I have just enough sense left to perceive it. It is the way I have lived, I suppose. I have never known the need to deny myself anything I wanted.” Then suddenly he swung round, and the outburst came. “But, my God! I want Aline as I have never wanted anything yet. I think I should kill myself in rage if through my folly I should have lost her.” He struck his brow with his hand. “I am a beast,” he said. “I should have known that if that sweet saint got word of these petty devilries of mine she would despise me; and I tell you, Charles, I'd go through fire to regain her respect.”

“I hope it is to be regained on easier terms,” said Charles, and then to ease the situation, which began to irk him by its solemnity, he made a feeble joke. “It is merely asked of you that you refrain from going through certain fires that are not accounted by Mademoiselle of too purifying a nature.”

“As to that Binet girl, it is finished—finished,” said the Marquis.

“I congratulate you. When did you make that decision?”

“This moment. I would to God I had made it twenty-four hours ago. As it is . . .” he shrugged. “Why, twenty-four hours of her have been enough for me, as they would have been for any man—a mercenary, self-seeking little baggage with the soul of a trull. Bah!” He shuddered in disgust of himself and her.

“Ah! That makes it easier for you,” said M. de Sautron cynically.

“Don't say it, Charles. It is not so. Had you been less of a fool, you would have warned me sooner.”

“I may prove to have warned you soon enough, if you'll profit by the warning.”

“There is no penance I will not do. I will prostrate myself at her feet. I will abase myself before her. I will make confession in the proper spirit of contrition, and, Heaven helping

me, I'll keep to my purpose of amendment for her sweet sake." He was tragically in earnest.

To M. de Sautron, who had never seen him other than self-contained, supercilious, and mocking, this was an amazing revelation. He shrank from it almost; it gave him the feeling of prying, of peeping through a keyhole. He slapped his friend's shoulder.

"My dear Gervais, here is a magnificently romantic mood. Enough said. Keep to it, and I promise you that all will presently be well. I will be your ambassador, and you shall have no cause to complain."

"But may I not go to her myself?"

"If you are wise you will at once efface yourself. Write to her if you will—make your act a contrition by letter. I will explain why you have gone without seeing her. I will tell her that you did so upon my advice, and I will do it tactfully. I am a good diplomat, Gervais. Trust me."

M. le Marquis raised his head, and showed a face that pain was searing. He held out his hand. "Very well, Charles. Serve me in this, and count me your friend in all things."

CHAPTER XI

THE FRACAS AT THE THÉÂTRE FEYDAU

LEAVING his host to act as his plenipotentiary with Mademoiselle de Kercadiou, and to explain to her that it was his profound contrition that compelled him to depart without taking formal leave of her, the Marquis rolled away from Sautron in a cloud of gloom. Twenty-four hours with La Binet had been more than enough for a man of his fastidious and discerning taste. He looked back upon the episode with nausea—the inevitable psychological reaction—marvelling at himself that until yesterday he should have found her so desirable, and cursing himself that for the sake of that ephemeral and worthless gratification he should seriously have imperilled his chances of winning Mademoiselle de Kercadiou to wife. There is, after all, nothing very extraordinary in his frame of mind, so that I need not elaborate it further. It resulted from the conflict between the beast and the angel that go to make up the composition of every man.

The Chevalier de Chabrillanne—who in reality occupied

towards the Marquis a position akin to that of gentleman-in-waiting—sat opposite to him in the enormous travelling berline. A small folding table had been erected between them, and the Chevalier suggested piquet. But M. le Marquis was in no humour for cards. His thoughts absorbed him. As they were rattling over the cobbles of Nantes' streets, he remembered a promise to La Binet to witness her performance that night in 'The Faithless Lover.' And now he was running away from her. The thought was repugnant to him on two scores. He was breaking his pledged word, and he was acting like a coward. And there was more than that. He had led the mercenary little strumpet—it was thus he thought of her at present, and with some justice—to expect favours from him in addition to the lavish awards which already he had made her. The baggage had almost sought to drive a bargain with him as to her future. He was to take her to Paris, put her into her own furniture—as the expression ran, and still runs—and under the shadow of his powerful protection see that the doors of the great theatres of the capital should be opened to her talents. He had not—he was thankful to reflect—exactly committed himself. But neither had he definitely refused her. It became necessary now to come to an understanding, since he was compelled to choose between his trivial passion for her—a passion quenched already—and his deep, almost spiritual devotion to Mademoiselle de Kercadiou.

His honour, he considered, demanded of him that he should at once deliver himself from a false position. La Binet would make a scene, of course; but he knew the proper specific to apply to hysteria of that nature. Money, after all, has its uses.

He pulled the cord. The carriage rolled to a standstill; a footman appeared at the door.

"To the Théâtre Feydau," said he.

The footman vanished and the berline rolled on. M. de Chabrillanne laughed cynically.

"I'll trouble you not to be amused," snapped the Marquis. "You don't understand." Thereafter he explained himself. It was a rare condescension in him. But then, he could not bear to be misunderstood in such a matter. Chabrillanne grew serious in reflection of the Marquis's extreme seriousness.

"Why not write?" he suggested. "Myself, I confess that I should find it easier."

Nothing could better have revealed M. le Marquis's state of mind than his answer.

"Letters are liable both to miscarriage and to misconstruction.

—two risks I will not run. If she did not answer, I should never know which had been incurred. And I shall have no peace of mind until I know that I have set a term to this affair. The berline can wait while we are at the theatre. We will go on afterwards. We will travel all night if necessary."

"Peste!" said M. de Chabrilanne, with a grimace. But that was all.

The great travelling carriage drew up at the lighted portals of the Feydau, and M. le Marquis stepped out. He entered the theatre with Chabrilanne, all unconsciously to deliver himself into the hands of André-Louis.

André-Louis was in a state of exasperation produced by Climène's long absence from Nantes in the company of M. le Marquis, and fed by the unspeakable complacency with which M. Binet regarded that event of quite unmistakable import.

However much he might affect the frame of mind of the stoics, and seek to judge with a complete detachment, in the heart and soul of him André-Louis was tormented and revolted. It was not Climène he blamed. He had been mistaken in her. She was just a poor, weak vessel driven helplessly by the first breath, however foul, that promised her advancement. She suffered from the plague of greed; and he congratulated himself upon having discovered it before making her his wife. He felt for her now nothing but a deal of pity and some contempt. The pity was begotten of the love she had lately inspired in him. It might be likened to the dregs of love, all that remained after the potent wine of it had been drained off. His anger he reserved for her father and her seducer.

The thoughts that were stirring in him on that Monday morning, when it was discovered that Climène had not yet returned from her excursion of the previous day in the coach of Monsieur le Marquis, were already wicked enough without the spurring they received from the distraught Léandre.

Hitherto the attitude of each of these men towards the other had been one of mutual contempt. The phenomenon has frequently been observed in like cases. Now, what appeared to be a common misfortune brought them into a sort of alliance. So, at least, it seemed to Léandre when he went in quest of André-Louis, who with apparent unconcern was smoking a pipe upon the quay immediately facing the inn.

"Name of a pig!" said Léandre. "How can you take your ease and smoke at such a time?"

Scaramouche surveyed the sky. "I do not find it too cold," said he. "The sun is shining. I am very well here."

"Do I talk of the weather?" Léandre was very excited.

"Of what, then?"

"Of Climène, of course."

"Oh! The lady has ceased to interest me," he lied.

Léandre stood squarely in front of him, a handsome figure handsomely dressed in those days, his hair well powdered, his stockings of silk. His face was pale, his large eyes looked larger than usual.

"Ceased to interest you? Are you not to marry her?"

André-Louis expelled a cloud of smoke. "You cannot wish to be offensive. Yet you almost suggest that I live on other men's leavings."

"My God!" said Léandre, overcome, and he stared awhile. Then he burst out afresh. "Are you quite heartless? Are you always Scaramouche?"

"What do you expect me to do?" asked André-Louis, evincing surprise in his own turn, but faintly.

"I do not expect you to let her go without a struggle."

"But she has gone already," André-Louis pulled at his pipe a moment, what time Léandre clenched and unclenched his hands in impotent rage. "And to what purpose struggle against the inevitable? Did you struggle when I took her from you?"

"She was not mine to be taken from me. I but aspired and you won the race. But even had it been otherwise, where is the comparison? That was a thing in honour: this—this is hell."

His emotion moved André-Louis. He took Léandre's arm.

"You're a good fellow, Léandre. I am glad I intervened to save you from your fate."

"Oh, you don't love her," cried the other, passionately. "You never did. You don't know what it means to love, or you'd not talk like this. My God! if she had been my affianced wife and this had happened, I should have killed the man—killed him! Do you hear me! But you . . . Oh, you, you come out here and smoke, and take the air, and talk of her as another man's leavings. I wonder I didn't strike you for the word."

He tore his arm from the other's grip, and looked almost as if he would strike him now.

"You should have done," said André-Louis. "It's in your part."

With an imprecation Léandre turned on his heel to go. André-Louis arrested his departure.

"A moment, my friend. Test me by yourself. Would you marry her now?"

"Would I?" The young man's eyes blazed with passion. "Would I? Let her say that she will marry me, and I am her slave."

"Slave is the right word—a slave in hell."

"It would never be hell to me where she was, whatever she had done. I love her, man—I am not like you. I love her, do you hear me?"

"I have known it for some time," said André-Louis, "though I didn't suspect your attack of the disease to be quite so violent. Well, God knows I loved her too, quite enough to share your thirst for killing. For myself, the blue blood of La Tour d'Azyr would hardly quench this thirst. I should like to add to it the dirty fluid that flows in the veins of the unspeakable Binet."

For a second his emotion had been out of hand, and he revealed to Léandre in the mordant tone of those last words something of the fires that burned under his icy exterior. The young man caught him by the hand.

"I knew you were acting," said he. "You feel—you feel as I do."

"Behold us, fellows in viciousness. I have betrayed myself it seems. Well, and what now? Do you want to see this pretty Marquis torn limb from limb? I might afford you the spectacle."

"What?" Léandre stared, wondering was this another of Scaramouche's cynicisms.

"It isn't really difficult provided I have aid. I require only a little. Will you lend it me?"

"Anything you ask," Léandre exploded. "My life if you require it."

André-Louis took his arm again. "Let us walk," he said. "I will instruct you."

When they came back the company was already at dinner. Mademoiselle had not yet returned. Sullenness presided at the table. Columbine and Madame wore anxious expressions. The fact was that relations between Binet and his troupe were daily growing more strained.

André-Louis and Léandre went each to his accustomed place. Binet's little eyes followed them with a malicious gleam, his thick lips pouted into a crooked smile.

"You two are grown very friendly of a sudden," he mocked.

"You are a man of discernment, Binet," said Scaramouche, the cold loathing of his voice itself an insult. "Perhaps you discern the reason?"

"It is readily discerned."

"Regale the company with it!" he begged, and waited. "What? You hesitate? Is it possible that there are limits to your shamelessness?"

Binet reared his great head. "Are you trying to quarrel with me, Scaramouche?" Thunder was rumbling in his deep voice.

"Quarrel? You want to laugh. A man doesn't quarrel with creatures like you. We all know the place held in the public esteem by complacent husbands. But, in God's name, what place is there at all for complacent fathers?"

Binet heaved himself up, a great towering mass of manhood. Violently he shook off the restraining hand of Pierrot, who sat on his left.

"A thousand devils!" he roared, "if you take that tone with me, I'll break every bone in your filthy body."

"If you were to lay a finger on me, Binet, you would give me the only provocation I still need to kill you." He was as calm as ever, and therefore the more menacing. Alarm stirred the company. He protruded from his pocket the butt of a pistol—newly purchased. "I go armed, Binet. It is only fair to give you warning. Provoke me as you have suggested, and I'll kill you with no more compunction than I should kill a slug, which, after all, is the thing you most resemble—a slug, Binet; a fat, slimy body; foulness without soul and without intelligence. When I come to think of it, I can't suffer to sit at table with you. It turns my stomach."

He pushed away his platter and got up. "I'll go and eat at the ordinary below stairs."

Thereupon up jumped Columbine.

"And I'll come with you, Scaramouche," cried she.

It acted like a signal. Had the thing been concerted it could not have fallen out more uniformly. Binet, in fact, was persuaded of a conspiracy. For in the wake of Columbine went Léandre, in the wake of Léandre, Polichinelle; and then all the rest together, until Binet found himself sitting alone at the head of an empty table in an empty room—a badly shaken man whose rage could afford him no support against the dread by which he was suddenly invaded.

He sat down to think things out, and he was still at that melancholy occupation when perhaps a half-hour later his daughter entered the room, returned at last from her excursion.

She looked pale, even a little scared—in reality excessively self-conscious now that the ordeal of facing all the company awaited her.

Seeing no one but her father in the room, she checked on the threshold.

"Where is everybody?" she asked, in a voice rendered natural by an effort.

M. Binet reared his great head and turned upon her eyes that were blood-injected. He scowled, blew out his thin lips and made harsh noises in his throat. Yet he took stock of her, so graceful and comely, and looking so completely the lady of fashion in her long fur-trimmed travelling-coat of bottle-green, her muff, and her broad hat adorned by a sparkling Rhine-stone buckle above her adorably coiffed brown hair. No need to fear the future whilst he owned such a daughter, let Scaramouche play what tricks he would.

He expressed, however, none of these comforting reflections.

"So you're back at last, little fool," he growled in greeting. "I was beginning to ask myself if we should perform this evening. It wouldn't greatly have surprised me if you had not returned in time. Indeed, since you have chosen to play the fine hand you held in your own way, and scorning my advice, nothing can surprise me."

She crossed the room to the table, and, leaning against it, looked down upon him almost disdainfully.

"I have nothing to regret," she said.

"So every fool says at first. Nor would you admit it if you had. You are like that. You go your own way in spite of advice from older heads. Death of my life, girl, what do you know of men?"

"I am not complaining," she reminded him.

"No, but you may be presently, when you discover that you would have done better to have been guided by your old father. So long as your Marquis languished for you, there was nothing you could not have done with the fool. So long as you let him have no more than your finger-tips to kiss. . . . Ah, name of a name! that was the time to build your future. If you live to be a thousand you'll never have such a chance again, and you've squandered it—for what?"

Mademoiselle sat down. "You're sordid," she said, with disgust.

"Sordid, am I?" His thick lips curled again. "I have had enough of the dregs of life, and so I should have thought have you. You held a hand on which to have won a fortune if you had played it as I bade you. Well, you've played it, and where's the fortune? We can whistle for that as a sailor whistles for the wind. And, by Heaven, we'll need to whistle

presently if the weather in the troupe continues as it's set in! That scoundrel Scaramouche has been at his ape's tricks with them. They've suddenly turned moral. They won't sit at table with me any more." He was spluttering between anger and sardonic mirth. "It was your friend Scaramouche set them the example of that. He threatened my life actually. Threatened my life! Called me . . . Oh, but what does that matter? What matters it that the next thing to happen to us will be that the Binet Troupe will discover it can manage without M. Binet and his daughter. This scoundrelly bastard I've befriended has little by little robbed me of everything. It's in his power to-day to rob me of my troupe, and the knave's ungrateful enough and vile enough to make use of his dower."

"Let him," said Mademoiselle, contemptuously.

"Let him?" He was aghast. "And what's to become of us?"

"In no case will the Binet Troupe interest me much longer," said she. "I shall be going to Paris soon. There are better theatres there than the Feydau. There's Mlle. Montansier's theatre in the Palais Royal; there's the Ambigu Comique; there's the Comédie Française; there's even a possibility that I may have a theatre of my own."

His eyes grew big for once. He stretched out a fat hand and placed it in one of hers. She noticed that it trembled.

"Has he promised that? Has he promised?"

She looked at him with her head on one side, eyes sly and a queer little smile on her perfect lips.

"He did not refuse me when I asked it," she answered, with a conviction that all was as she desired it.

"Bah!" He withdrew his hand and heaved himself up. There was disgust on his face. "He did not refuse!" he mocked her, and then with passion: "Had you acted as I advised you, he would have consented to anything that you asked, and, what is more, he would have provided anything that you asked—anything that lay within his means, and they are inexhaustible. You have changed a certainty into a possibility, and I hate possibilities. God of God! I have lived on possibilities, and infernally near starved on them."

Had she known of the interview taking place at that moment at the Château de Sautron she would have laughed less confidently at her father's gloomy forebodings. But she was destined never to know, which indeed was the cruellest punishment of all. She was to attribute all the evil which suddenly overwhelmed her the shattering of all the future hopes she

had founded upon the Marquis, and the sudden disintegration of the Binet Troupe, to the wicked interference of that villain Scaramouche.

She had this much justification, that possibly, without the warning from M. de Sautron, the Marquis would have found in the events of that evening at the Théâtre Feydau a sufficient reason for ending an entanglement that was fraught with too much unpleasant excitement, whilst the breaking-up of the Binet Troupe was most certainly the result of André-Louis's work. But it was not a result that he intended, or even foresaw.

So much was this the case, that in the interval after the second act he sought the dressing-room shared by Polichinelle and Rhodomont. Polichinelle was in the act of changing.

"I shouldn't trouble to change," he said. "The piece isn't likely to go beyond my opening scene of the next act with Léandre."

"What do you mean?"

"You'll see." He put a paper on Polichinelle's table amid the grease-paints. "Cast your eye over that. It's a sort of last will and testament in favour of the troupe. I was a lawyer once; the document is in order. I relinquish to all of you the share produced by my partnership in the company."

"But you don't mean that you are leaving us?" cried Polichinelle in alarm, whilst Rhodomont's sudden stare asked the same question.

Scaramouche's shrug was eloquent. Polichinelle ran on gloomily. "Of course, it was to have been foreseen. But why should you be the one to go? It is you who have made us; and it is you who are the real head and brains of the troupe; it is you who have raised it into a real theatrical company. If anyone must go, let it be Binet—Binet and his infernal daughter. Or if you go, name of a name! we all go with you."

"Ay," added Rhodomont, "we've had enough of that fat scoundrel."

"I had thought of it, of course," said André-Louis. "It was not vanity, for once; it was trust in your friendship. After to-night we may consider it again, if I survive."

"If you survive?" both cried.

Polichinelle got up. "Now what madness have you in mind?" he asked.

"For one thing, I think I am indulging Léandre, for another, I am pursuing an old quarrel."

The three knocks sounded as he spoke.

"There, I must go. Keep that paper, Polichinelle. After all, it may not be necessary."

He was gone. Rhodomont stared at Polichinelle, Polichinelle stared at Rhodomont.

"What the devil is he thinking of?" quoth the latter.

"That is most readily ascertained by going to see," replied Polichinelle. He completed changing in haste, and despite what Scaramouche had said; and then followed with Rhodomont.

As they approached the wings a roar of applause met them coming from the audience. It was applause and something else; applause on an unusual note. As it faded away they heard the voice of Scaramouche ringing clear as a bell:

"And so you see, my dear M. Léandre, that when you speak of the Third Estate it is necessary to be more explicit. What precisely is the Third Estate?"

"Nothing," said Léandre.

There was a gasp from the audience, audible in the wings, and then swiftly followed Scaramouche's next question:

"True. Alas! But what should it be?"

"Everything," said Léandre.

The audience roared its acclamations, the more violent because of the unexpectedness of that reply.

"True again," said Scaramouche. "And what is more, that is what it will be; that is what it already is. Do you doubt it?"

"I hope it," said the schooled Léandre.

"You may believe it," said Scaramouche, and again the acclamations rolled into thunder.

Polichinelle and Rhodomont exchanged glances; indeed, the former winked, not without mirth.

"Sacred name!" growled a voice behind them. "Is the scoundrel at his political tricks again?"

They turned to confront M. Binet. Moving with that noiseless tread of his, he had come up unheard behind them, and there he stood now, in his scarlet suit of Pantaloon under a trailing bedgown, his little eyes glaring from either side of his false nose. But their attention was held by the voice of Scaramouche. He had stepped to the front of the stage.

"He doubts it," he was telling the audience. "But then this M. Léandre is himself akin to those who worship the worm-eaten idol of Privilege, and so he is a little afraid to believe a truth that is becoming apparent to all the world. Shall I convince him? Shall I tell him how a company of noblemen backed by their servants under arms—six hundred men in all—sought to dictate to the Third Estate of Rennes a few short weeks ago? Must I remind him of the martial front shown on

that occasion by the Third Estate, and how they swept the streets clean of that rabble of nobles—*cette canaille noble ? . . .*”

Applause interrupted him. The phrase had struck home and caught. Those who had writhed under that infamous designation from their betters leapt at this turning of it against the nobles themselves.

“But let me tell you of their leader—*le plus noble de cette canaille, ou bien le plus canaille de ces nobles !* You know him—that one. He fears many things, but the voice of truth he fears most. With such as him the eloquent truth eloquently spoken is a thing instantly to be silenced. So he marshalled his peers and their valetaille, and led them out to slaughter these miserable bourgeois who dared to raise a voice. But these same miserable bourgeois did not choose to be slaughtered in the street of Rennes. It occurred to them that, since the nobles decreed that blood should flow, it might as well be the blood of the nobles. They marshalled themselves too—this noble rabble against the rabble of nobles—and they marshalled themselves so well that they drove M. de La Tour d’Azyr and his warlike following from the field with broken heads and shattered delusions. They sought shelter at the hands of the Cordeliers ; and the shavelings gave them sanctuary in their convent—those who survived, among whom was their proud leader, M. de La Tour d’Azyr. You have heard of this valiant Marquis, this great lord of life and death ? ”

The pit was in an uproar a moment. It quieted again as Scaramouche continued :

“Oh, it was a fine spectacle to see this mighty hunter scuttling to cover like a hare, going to earth in the Cordelier Convent. Rennes has not seen him since. Rennes would like to see him again. But if he is valorous, he is also discreet. And where do you think he had taken refuge—this great nobleman who wanted to see the streets of Rennes washed in the blood of its citizens, this man who would have butchered old and young of the contemptible *canaille* to silence the voice of reason and liberty that presumes to ring through France to-day ? Where do you think he hides himself ? Why, here in Nantes.”

Again there was an uproar.

“What do you say ? Impossible ? Why, my friends, at this moment he is here in this theatre—skulking up there in that box. He is too shy to show himself—oh, a very modest gentleman ! But there he is behind the curtains. Will you not show yourself to your friends, M. de La Tour d’Azyr, Monsieur le Marquis who considers eloquence so very dangerous a gift ?

See, they would like a word with you ; they do not believe me when I tell them that you are here."

Now, whatever he may have been, and whatever the views held on the subject by André-Louis, M. de La Tour d'Azyr was certainly not a coward. To say that he was hiding in Nantes was not true. He came and went there openly and unabashed. It happened, however, that the Nantais were ignorant until this moment of his presence among them. But then he would have disdained to have informed them of it, just as he would have disdained to have concealed it from them.

Challenged thus, however, and despite the ominous manner in which the bourgeois element in the audience had responded to Scaramouche's appeal to its passions, despite the attempts made by Chabrilanne to restrain him, the Marquis swept aside the curtain at the side of the box, and suddenly showed himself, pale but self-contained and scornful as he surveyed first the daring of Scaramouche and then those others who at sight of him had given tongue to their hostility.

Hoots and yells assailed him, fists were shaken at him, canes were brandished menacingly.

"Assassin ! Scoundrel ! Coward ! Traitor !"

But he braved the storm, smiling upon them his ineffable contempt. He was waiting for the noise to cease : waiting to address them in his turn. But he waited in vain, as he very soon perceived.

The contempt he did not trouble to dissemble served but to goad them on.

In the pit pandemonium was already raging. Blows were being freely exchanged ; there were scuffling groups, and here and there swords were being drawn, but fortunately the press was too dense to permit of their being used effectively. Those who had women with them, and the timid by nature, were making haste to leave a house that looked like becoming a cock-pit, where chairs were being smashed to provide weapons, and parts of chandeliers were already being used as missiles.

One of these, hurled by the hand of a gentleman in one of the boxes, narrowly missed Scaramouche where he stood, looking down in a sort of grim triumph upon the havoc which his words had wrought. Knowing of what inflammable material the audience were composed, he had deliberately flung down amongst them the lighted torch of discord, to produce this conflagration.

He saw men falling quickly into groups representative of one side or the other of this great quarrel that already was

beginning to agitate the whole of France. Their rallying-cries were ringing through the theatre.

"Down with the *canaille*!" from some.

"Down with the privileged!" from others.

And then above the general din one cry rang out sharply and insistently.

"To the box! Death to the butcher of Rennes! Death to La Tour d'Azyr who makes war upon the people!"

There was a rush for one of the doors of the pit that opened upon the staircase leading to the boxes.

And now whilst battle and confusion spread with the speed of fire, overflowing from the theatre into the street itself, La Tour d'Azyr's box, which had become the main object of the attack of the bourgeoisie, had also become the rallying-ground for such gentlemen as were present in the theatre and for those who, without being men of birth themselves, were nevertheless attached to the party of the nobles.

La Tour d'Azyr had quitted the front of the box to meet those who came to join him. And now in the pit one group of infuriated gentlemen in attempting to reach the stage across the empty orchestra, so that they might deal with the audacious comedian who was responsible for this explosion, found itself opposed and held back by another group composed of men to whose feelings André-Louis had given expression.

Perceiving this, and remembering the chandelier, he turned to Léandre, who had remained beside him.

"I think it is time to be going," said he.

Léandre, looking ghastly under his paint, appalled by the storm, which exceeded by far anything that his unimaginative brain could have conjectured, gurgled an inarticulate agreement. But it looked as if already they were too late, for in that moment they were assailed from behind.

M. Binet had succeeded at last in breaking past Polichinelle and Rhodomont, who in view of his murderous rage had been endeavouring to restrain him. Half a dozen gentlemen, habitués of the green-room, had come round to the stage to disembowel the knave who had created this riot, and it was they who had flung aside the two comedians who hung upon Binet. After him they came now, their swords out; but after them again came Polichinelle, Rhodomont, Harlequin, Pierrot, Pasquariel, and Basque the artist, armed with such implements as they could hastily snatch up, and intent upon saving the man with whom they sympathised in spite of all, and in whom now all their hopes were centred.

Well ahead rolled Binet, moving faster than any had ever

seen him move, and swinging the long cane from which Pantaloon is inseparable.

"Infamous scoundrel!" he roared. "You have ruined me! But, name of a name, you shall pay!"

André-Louis turned to face him. "You confuse cause with effect," said he. But he got no further. Binet's cane, viciously driven, descended and broke upon his shoulder. Had he not moved swiftly aside as the blow fell it must have taken him across the head, and possibly stunned him. As he moved, he dropped his hand to his pocket, and swift upon the cracking of Binet's breaking cane came the crack of the pistol with which André-Louis replied:

"You had your warning, you filthy pander," he cried, and shot him through the body.

Binet went down screaming, whilst the fierce Polichinelle fiercer than ever in that moment of fierce reality, spoke quickly into André-Louis's ear.

"Fool! So much was not necessary! Away with you now, or you'll leave your skin here. Away with you!"

André-Louis thought it good advice, and took it. The gentlemen who had followed Binet in that punitive rush upon the stage, partly held in check by the improvised weapons of the players, partly intimidated by the second pistol that Scaramouche presented, let him go. He gained the wings, and here he found himself faced by a couple of sergeants of the watch, part of the police that was already invading the theatre with a view to restoring order. The sight of them reminded him unpleasantly of how he must stand towards the law for this night's work, and more particularly for that bullet lodged somewhere in Binet's obese body. He flourished his pistol.

"Make way, or I'll burn your brains!" he threatened them, and intimidated, themselves without fire-arms, they fell back and let him go. He slipped past the door of the green-room, where the ladies of the company had shut themselves in until the storm should be over, and so gained the street behind the theatre. It was deserted. Down this he went at a run, intent on reaching the inn for clothes and money, since it was impossible that he should take the road in the garb of Scaramouche.

BOOK III

THE SWORD

CHAPTER I

TRANSITION

You may agree, wrote André-Louis from Paris to Le Chapelier, in a letter which survives, that it is to be regretted I should definitely have discarded the livery of Scaramouche, since clearly there could be no livery fitter for my wear. It seems to be my part always to stir up strife and then to slip away before I am caught in the crash of the warring elements I have aroused. It is a humiliating reflection. I seek consolation in the reminder of Epictetus (do you ever read Epictetus?) that we are but actors in a play, of such a part as it may please the Director to assign us. It does not, however, console me to have been cast for a part so contemptible, to find myself excelling ever in the art of running away. But if I am not brave, at least I am prudent; so that where I lack one virtue I may claim possession of another almost to excess. On a previous occasion it was proposed to hang me for sedition. Should I have stayed to be hanged? This time it may be proposed to hang me for several things, including murder; for I do not know whether that scoundrel Binet be alive or dead from the dose of lead I pumped into his fat paunch. Nor can I say that I very greatly care. If I have a hope at all in the matter, it is that he is dead—and damned. But I am really indifferent. My own concerns are troubling me enough. I have all but spent the little money that I contrived to conceal about me before I fled from Nantes on that dreadful night; and both of the only two professions of which I can claim to know anything—the law and the stage—are closed to me, since I cannot find employment in either without revealing myself as a fellow who is urgently wanted by the hangman. As things are, it is very possible that I may die of hunger, especially considering the present price of victuals in this ravenous city. Again I have recourse to Epictetus for comfort. "It is better,"

he says, "to die of hunger, having lived without grief and fear, than to live with a troubled spirit amid abundance." I seem likely to perish in the estate that he accounts so enviable. That it does not seem exactly enviable to me merely proves that as a Stoic I am not a success.

There is also another letter of his written at about the same time to the Marquis de La Tour d'Azyr—a letter since published by M. Emile Quersac in his *Undercurrents of the Revolution in Brittany*, unearthed by him from the archives of Rennes, to which it had been consigned by M. de Lesdiguières, who had received it for justiciary purposes from the Marquis.

The Paris newspapers, he writes in this, which have reported in considerable detail the fracas at the Théâtre Feydau and disclosed the true identity of the Scaramouche who provoked it, inform me also that you have escaped the fate I had intended for you when I raised that storm of public opinion and public indignation. I would not have you take satisfaction in the thought that I regret your escape. I do not. I rejoice in it. To deal justice by death has this disadvantage, that the victim has no knowledge that justice has overtaken him. Had you died, had you been torn limb from limb that night, I should now repine in the thought of your eternal and untroubled slumber. Not in euthanasia but in torment of mind should the guilty atone. You see, I am not sure that hell hereafter is a certainty, whilst I am quite sure that it can be a certainty in this life; and I desire you to continue to live yet awhile that you may taste something of its bitterness.

You murdered Philippe de Vilmorin because you feared what you described as his very dangerous gift of eloquence. I took an oath that day that your evil deed should be fruitless; that I would render it so; that the voice you had done murder to stifle should in spite of that ring like a trumpet through the land. That was my conception of revenge. Do you realise how I have been fulfilling it, how I shall continue to fulfil it as occasion offers? In the speech with which I fired the people of Rennes on the very morrow of that deed did you not hear the voice of Philippe de Vilmorin uttering the ideas that were his, with a fire and a passion greater than he could have commanded, because Nemesis lent me her inflaming aid? In the voice of Omnes Omnibus at Nantes—my voice again—demanding the petition that sounded the knell of your hopes of coercing the Third Estate, did you not hear again the voice of Philippe de Vilmorin? Did you reflect that it was the mind of the man you had murdered, resurrected in me, his surviving friend, which made necessary your futile attempt under arms last

January, wherein your order, finally beaten, was driven to seek sanctuary in the Cordelier Convent? And that night when from the stage of the Feydau you were denounced to the people, did you not hear yet again in the voice of Scaramouche the voice of Philippe de Vilmorin, using that dangerous gift of eloquence which you so foolishly imagined you could silence with a sword-thrust? It is becoming a persecution—is it not?—this voice from the grave that insists upon making itself heard, that will not rest until you have been cast into the pit. You will be regretting by now that you did not kill me too, as I invited you on that occasion. I can picture to myself the bitterness of this regret, and I contemplate it with satisfaction. Regret of neglected opportunity is the worst hell that a living soul can inhabit, particularly such a soul as yours. It is because of this that I am glad to know that you survived the riot at the Feydau, although at the time it was no part of my intention that you should. Because of this I am content that you should live to enrage and suffer in the shadow of your evil deed, knowing at last—since you had not hitherto the wit to discern it for yourself—that the voice of Philippe de Vilmorin will follow you to denounce you ever more loudly, ever more insistently, until having lived in dread you shall go down in blood under the just rage which your victim's dangerous gift of eloquence is kindling against you."

I find it odd that he should have omitted from this letter all mention of Mademoiselle Binet, and I am disposed to account it at least a partial insincerity that he should have assigned entirely to his self-imposed mission, and not at all to his lacerated feelings in the matter of Climène, the action which he had taken at the Feydau.

These two letters, both written in April of that year 1789, had for only immediate effect to increase the activity with which André-Louis Moreau was sought.

Le Chapelier would have found him so as to lend him assistance, to urge upon him once again that he should take up a political career. The electors of Nantes would have found him—at least, they would have found Omnes Omnibus, of whose identity with himself they were still in ignorance—on each of the several occasions when a vacancy occurred in their body. And the Marquis de La Tour d'Azyr and M. de Lesdiguières would have found him that they might send him to the gallows.

With a purpose no less vindictive was he being sought by M. Binet, now unhappily recovered from his wound to face completest ruin. His troupe had deserted him during his illness, and, reconstituted under the direction of Polichinelle it was now striving with tolerable success to continue upon

the lines which André-Louis had laid down. Monsieur le Marquis, prevented by the riot from expressing in person to Mademoiselle Binet his purpose of making an end of their relations, had been constrained to write to her to that effect from Azyr a few days later. He tempered the blow by enclosing in discharge of all liabilities a bill on the Caisse d'Escompte for a hundred louis. Nevertheless, it almost crushed the unfortunate Climène, and it enabled her father when he recovered to enrage her by pointing out that she owed this turn of events to the premature surrender she had made in defiance of his sound worldly advice. Father and daughter were alike left to assign the Marquis's desertion, naturally enough, to the riot at the Feydau. They laid that with the rest to the account of Scaramouche, and were forced in bitterness to admit that the scoundrel had taken a superlative revenge. Climène may even have come to consider that it would have paid her better to have run a straight course with Scaramouche, and by marrying him to have trusted to his undoubted talents to place her on the summit to which her ambition urged her, and to which it was now futile for her to aspire. If so, that reflection must have been her sufficient punishment. For, as André-Louis so truly says, there is no worse hell than that provided by the regrets for wasted opportunities.

Meanwhile, the fiercely-sought André-Louis Moreau had gone to earth completely for the present. And the brisk police of Paris, urged on by the King's Lieutenant from Rennes, hunted for him in vain. Yet he might have been found in a house in the Rue du Hasard within a stone's throw of the Palais Royal, whither purest chance had conducted him.

That which in his letter to Le Chapelier he represents as a contingency of the near future was, in fact, the case in which already he found himself. He was destitute. His money was exhausted, including that procured by the sale of such articles of adornment as were not of absolute necessity.

So desperate was his case that, strolling one gusty April morning down the Rue du Hasard with his nose in the wind looking for what might be picked up, he stopped to read a notice outside the door of a house on the left side of the street as you approach the Rue de Richelieu. There was no reason why he should have gone down the Rue du Hasard. Perhaps its name attracted him as appropriate to his case.

The notice, written in a big round hand, announced that a young man of good address with some knowledge of swordsmanship was required by M. Bertrand des Amis on the second floor. Above this notice was a black oblong board, and on

this a shield, which, in vulgar terms, may be described as red, charged with two crossed swords and four fleurs-de-lys, one in each angle of the saltire. Under the shield, in letters of gold, ran the legend:

BERTRAND DES AMIS

MAITOR EN FAIT D'ARMES DES ACADEMIES DU ROI

André-Louis stood considering. He could claim, he thought, to possess the qualifications demanded. He was certainly young, and, he believed, of tolerable address, whilst the fencing lessons he had received in Nantes had given him at least an elementary knowledge of swordsmanship. The notice looked as if it had been pinned there some days ago, suggesting that applicants for the post were not very numerous. In that case perhaps M. Bertrand des Amis would not be too exigent. And anyway, André-Louis had not eaten for four-and-twenty hours, and whilst the employment here offered—the precise nature of which was yet to ascertain—did not appear to be such as André-Louis would deliberately have chosen, he was in no case now to be fastidious.

Then, too, he liked the name of Bertrand des Amis. It felicitously combined suggestions of chivalry and friendliness. Also the man's profession being of a kind that is flavoured with romance, it was possible that M. Bertrand des Amis would not ask too many questions.

In the end he climbed to the second floor. On the landing he paused outside a door, on which was written, "Academy of M. Bertrand des Amis." He pushed this open and found himself in a sparsely-furnished, untenanted ante-chamber. From a room beyond, the door of which was closed, came the stamping of feet, the click and slither of steel upon steel, and dominating these sounds a vibrant, sonorous voice speaking a language that was certainly French—but such French as is never heard outside a fencing-school.

"Coulez ! Mais, coulez donc ! . . . So ! Now the flanconade—en carte. . . . And here is the riposte. . . . Let us begin again. Come ! The ward of tierce. Make the coupé, and then the quinte par dessus les armes. . . . Oh, mais allongez ! Allongez ! Allez au fond !" the voice cried in expostulation. "Come, that was better." The blades ceased.

"Remember : the hand in pronation, the elbow not too far out. That will do for to-day. On Wednesday we shall

see you tirer au mur. It is more deliberate. Speed will follow when the mechanism of the movement is more assured."

Another voice murmured in answer. The steps moved aside. The lesson was at an end. André-Louis tapped on the door.

It was opened by a tall, slender, gracefully-proportioned man of perhaps forty. Black silk breeches and stockings ending in light shoes clothed him from the waist down. Above he was encased to the chin in a closely-fitting plastron of leather. His face was aquiline and swarthy, his eyes full and dark, his mouth firm, and his clubbed hair was of a lustrous black with here and there a thread of silver showing.

In the crook of his left arm he carried a fencing-mask, a thing of leather with a wire grating to protect the eyes. His keen glance played over André-Louis from head to foot.

"Monsieur?" he inquired, politely.

It was clear that he mistook André-Louis's quality, which is not surprising, for despite his sadly-reduced fortunes, his exterior was irreproachable, and M. des Amis was not to guess that he carried upon his back the whole of his possessions.

"You have a notice below, monsieur," he said, and from the swift lighting of the fencing-master's eyes he saw that he had been correct in his assumption that applicants for the position had not been jostling one another on his threshold. And then that flash of satisfaction was followed by a look of surprise.

"You are come in regard to that?"

André-Louis shrugged and half-smiled. "One must live," said he.

"But come in. Sit down there. I shall be at your . . . I shall be free to attend to you in a moment."

André-Louis took a seat on the bench ranged against one of the white-washed walls. The room was long and low, its floor entirely bare. Plain wooden forms such as that which he occupied were placed here and there against the wall. These last were plastered with fencing trophies, masks, crossed foils, stuffed plastrons, and a variety of swords, daggers and targets, belonging to a variety of ages and countries. There was also a portrait of an obese, big-nosed gentleman in an elaborately curled wig, wearing the blue ribbon of the Saint Esprit, in whom André-Louis recognised the King. And there was a framed parchment—M. des Amis's certificate from the King's Academy. A book-case occupied one corner, and near this, facing the last of the four windows that abundantly lighted the long room, there was a

small writing-table and an arm-chair. A plump and beautifully-dressed young gentleman stood by this table in the act of resuming coat and wig. M. des Amis sauntered over to him—moving, thought André-Louis, with extraordinary grace and elasticity—and stood in talk with him whilst also assisting him to complete his toilet.

At last the young gentleman took his departure, mopping himself with a fine kerchief that left a trail of perfume in the air. M. des Amis closed the door and turned to the applicant, who rose at once.

"Where have you studied?" quoth the fencing-master, abruptly.

"Studied?" André-Louis was taken aback by the question. "Oh, at Louis Le Grand."

M. des Amis frowned, looking up sharply as if to see whether his applicant was taking the liberty of amusing himself.

"In Heaven's name! I am not asking you where you did your humanities, but in what academy you studied fencing."

"Oh—fencing!" It had hardly ever occurred to André-Louis that the sword ranked seriously as a study. "I never studied it very much. I had some lessons in . . . in the country once."

The master's eyebrows went up. "But then," he cried, "why trouble to come up two flights of stairs?" He was impatient.

"The notice does not demand a high degree of proficiency. If I am not proficient enough, yet, knowing the rudiments, I can easily improve. I learn most things readily," André-Louis commended himself. "For the rest, I possess the other qualifications. I am young, as you observe, and I leave you to judge whether I am wrong in assuming that my address is good. I am by profession a man of the robe, though I realise that the motto here is *cedat toga armis*."

M. des Amis smiled approvingly. Undoubtedly the young man had a good address, and a certain readiness of wit it would appear. He ran a critical eye over his physical points.

"What is your name?" he asked.

André-Louis hesitated a moment. "André-Louis," he said.

The dark eyes coned him more searchingly.

"Well? André-Louis what?"

"Just André-Louis. Louis is my surname."

"Oh! An odd surname. You come from Brittany by your accent. Why did you leave it?"

"To save my skin," he answered, without reflecting. And then made haste to cover the blunder. "I have an enemy," he explained.

M. des Amis frowned, stroking his square chin. "You ran away?"

"You may say so."

"A coward, eh?"

"I don't think so." And then he lied romantically. Surely a man who lived by the sword should have a weakness for the romantic. "You see, my enemy is a swordsman of great strength—the best blade in the province, if not the best blade in France. That is his repute. I thought I would come to Paris to learn something of the art, and then go back and kill him. That, to be frank, is why your notice attracted me. You see, I have not the means to take lessons otherwise. I thought to find work here in the law. But I have failed. There are too many lawyers in Paris as it is, and whilst waiting I have consumed the little money that I had, so that . . . so that, *enfin*, your notice seemed to me something to which a special providence had directed me."

M. des Amis gripped him by the shoulders and looked into his face.

"Is this true, my friend?" he asked.

"Not a word of it," said André-Louis, wrecking his chances on an irresistible impulse to say the unexpected. But he didn't wreck them. M. des Amis burst into laughter; and having laughed his fill, confessed himself charmed by his applicant's fundamental honesty.

"Take off your coat," he said, "and let us see what you can do. Nature, at least, designed you for a swordsman. You are light, active and supple, with a good length of arm, and you seem intelligent. I may make something of you, teach you enough for my purpose, which is that you should give the elements of the art to new pupils before I take them in hand to finish them. Let us try. Take that mask and foil and come over here."

He led him to the end of the room, where the bare floor was scored with lines of chalk to guide the beginner in the management of his feet.

At the end of a ten minutes' bout, M. des Amis offered him the situation, and explained it. In addition to imparting the rudiments of the art to beginners, he was to brush out the fencing-room every morning, keep the foils furbished, assist the gentlemen who came for lessons to dress and undress, and make himself generally useful. His wages for the present

were to be forty livres a month, and he might sleep in an alcove behind the fencing-room if he had no other lodging.

The position, you see, had its humiliations. But, if André-Louis would hope to dine, he must begin by eating his pride as an *hors d'œuvre*.

"And so," he said, controlling a grimace, "the robe yields not only to the sword, but to the broom as well. Be it so. I stay."

It is characteristic of him that, having made that choice he should have thrown himself into the work with enthusiasm. It was ever his way to do whatever he did with all the resources of his mind and energies of his body. When he was not instructing very young gentlemen in the elements of the art, showing them the elaborate and intricate salute—which with a few days' hard practice he had mastered to perfection—and the eight guards, he was himself hard at work on those same guards, exercising eye, wrist, and knees.

Perceiving his enthusiasm, and seeing the obvious possibilities it opened out of turning him into a really effective assistant, M. des Amis presently took him more seriously in hand.

"Your application and zeal, my friend, are deserving of more than forty livres a month," the master informed him at the end of a week. "For the present, however, I will make up what else I consider due to you by imparting to you the secrets of this noble art. Your future depends upon how you profit by your exceptional good fortune in receiving instruction from me."

Thereafter every morning before the opening of the academy the master would fence for half an hour with his new assistant. Under this really excellent tuition André-Louis improved at a rate that both astounded and flattered M. des Amis. He would have been less flattered and more astounded had he known that at least half the secret of André-Louis's amazing progress lay in the fact that he was devouring the contents of the master's library, which was made up of a dozen or so treatises on fencing by such great masters as La Boëssière, Danet, and the syndic of the King's Academy, Augustin Rousseau. To M. des Amis, whose swordsmanship was all based on practice and not at all on theory, who was, indeed, no theorist or student in any sense, that little library was merely a suitable adjunct to a fencing academy, a proper piece of decorative furniture. The books themselves meant nothing to him in any other sense. He had not the type of mind that could have read them with profit, nor could he understand that another should do so. André-Louis, on the contrary, a man with the habit

of study, with the acquired faculty of learning from books, read those books with enormous profit, kept their precepts in mind, critically set off those of one master against those of another, and made for himself a choice which he proceeded to put into practice.

At the end of a month it suddenly dawned upon M. des Amis that his assistant had developed into a fencer of very considerable force, a man in a bout with whom it became necessary to exert himself if he were to escape defeat.

"I said from the first," he told him one day, "that Nature designed you for a swordsman. See how justified I was, and see also how well I have known how to mould the material with which Nature had equipped you."

"To the master be the glory," said André-Louis.

His relations with M. des Amis had meanwhile become of the friendliest, and he was now beginning to receive from him other pupils than mere beginners. In fact André-Louis was becoming an assistant in a much fuller sense of the word. M. de Amis, a chivalrous, open-handed fellow, far from taking advantage of what he had guessed to be the young man's difficulties rewarded his zeal by increasing his wages to four louis a month.

From the earnest and thoughtful study of the theories of others, it followed—now as not uncommonly happens—that André-Louis came to develop theories of his own. He lay one June morning on his little truckle bed in the alcove behind the academy, considering a passage that he had read last night in Danet on double and triple feints. It had seemed to him when reading it that Danet had stopped short on the threshold of a great discovery in the art of fencing. Essentially a theorist, André-Louis perceived the theory suggested, which Danet himself in suggesting it had not perceived. He lay now on his back, surveying the cracks in the ceiling and considering this matter further with the lucidity that early morning often brings to an acute intelligence. You are to remember that for close upon two months now the sword had been André-Louis's daily exercise and almost hourly thought. Protracted concentration upon the subject was giving him an extraordinary penetration of vision. Swordsmanship, as he learnt and taught and saw it daily practised, consisted of a series of attacks and parries, a series of disengages from one line into another. But always a limited series. A half-dozen disengages on either side was, strictly-speaking, usually as far as any engagement went. Then one recommenced. But even so, these disengages were fortuitous. What if from first to last they should be calculated?

That was part of the thought—one of the two legs on which

his theory was to stand. The other was : what would happen if one so elaborated Danet's ideas on the triple feint as to merge them into a series of actual calculated disengages to culminate at the fourth or fifth or even sixth disengage—that is to say, if one were to make a series of attacks inviting ripostes again to be countered, each of which was not intended to go home, but simply to play the opponent's blade into a line that must open him ultimately, and as predetermined, for an irresistible lunge ? Each counter of the opponent's would have to be preconsidered in this widening of his guard, a widening so gradual that he should himself be unconscious of it, and throughout intent upon getting home his own point on one of those counters.

André-Louis had been in his time a chess-player of some force, and at chess he had excelled by virtue of his capacity for thinking ahead. That virtue applied to fencing should all but revolutionise the art. It was so applied already, of course, but only in an elementary and very limited fashion, in mere feints, single, double, or triple. But even the triple feint should be a clumsy device compared with this method upon which he theorised.

He considered further, and the conviction grew that he held the key of a discovery. He was impatient to put his theory to the test.

That morning he was given a pupil of some force, against whom usually he was hard put to it to defend himself. Coming on guard, he made up his mind to hit him on the fourth disengage predetermining the four passes that should lead up to it. They engaged in tierce, and André-Louis led the attack by a beat and a straightening of the arm. Came the demi-centre he expected, which he promptly countered by a thrust in quinte ; this being countered again, he re-entered still lower, and being again correctly parried, as he had calculated, he lunged swirling his point into carte, and got home full upon his opponent's breast. The ease of it surprised him.

They began again. This time he resolved to go in on the fifth disengage, and in on that he went with the same ease. Then, complicating the matter further, he decided to try the sixth, and worked out in his mind the combination of the five preliminary engages. Yet again he succeeded as easily as before.

The young gentleman opposed to him laughed with just a tinge of mortification in his voice.

"I am all to pieces this morning," he said.

"You are not of your usual force," André-Louis politely agreed. And then greatly daring, always to test that theory of his to the uttermost : "So much so," he added, "that I could almost be sure of hitting you as and when I declare."

The capable pupil looked at him with a half-sneer. "Ah, that, no!" said he.

"Let us try. On the fourth disengage I shall touch you, Allons! En garde!"

And as he promised, so it happened.

The young gentleman, who hitherto had held no great opinion of André-Louis's swordsmanship accounting him well enough for purposes of practice when the master was otherwise engaged opened wide his eyes. In a burst of mingled generosity and intoxication, André-Louis was almost for disclosing his method—a method which a little later was to become a common-place of the fencing-rooms. Betimes he checked himself. To reveal his secret would be to destroy the prestige that must accrue to him from exercising it.

At noon, the academy being empty, M. des Amis called André-Louis to one of the occasional lessons which he still received. And for the first time in all his experience with André-Louis, M. des Amis received from him a full hit in the course of the first bout. He laughed, well pleased, like the generous fellow he was.

"Aha! You are improving very fast, my friend."

He still laughed, though not so well pleased, when he was hit in the second bout. After that he settled down to fight in earnest, with the result that André-Louis was hit three times in succession. The speed and accuracy of the fencing-master when fully exerting himself disconcerted André-Louis's theory, which, for want of being exercised in practice, still demanded too much consideration.

But that his theory was sound he accounted fully established, and with that, for the moment, he was content. It remained only to perfect by practice the application of it. To this he now devoted himself with the passionate enthusiasm of the discoverer. He confined himself to a half-dozen combinations, which he practised assiduously until each had become almost automatic. And he proved their infallibility upon the best among M. des Amis's pupils.

Finally, a week or so after that last bout of his with des Amis, the master called him once again to practice.

Hit again in the first bout, the master set himself to exert all his skill against his assistant. But to-day it availed him nothing before André-Louis's impetuous attacks.

After the third hit, M. des Amis stepped back and pulled off his mask.

"What's this?" he asked. He was pale, and his dark brows were contracted in a frown. Not in years had he been so wounded in his self-love. "Have you been taught a secret botte?"

He had always boasted that he knew too much about the sword to believe any nonsense about secret bottles, but this performance of André-Louis's had shaken his convictions on that score.

"No," said André-Louis. "I have been working hard; and it happens that I fence with my brains."

"So I perceive. Well, well, I think I have taught you enough, my friend. I have no intention of having an assistant who is superior to myself."

"Little danger of that," said André-Louis, smiling pleasantly. "You have been fencing hard all morning, and you are tired, whilst I, having done little, am entirely fresh. That is the only secret of my momentary success."

His tact and the fundamental good nature of M. des Amis prevented the matter from going further along the road it was almost threatening to take. And thereafter, when they fenced together, André-Louis, who continued daily to perfect his theory into an almost infallible system, saw to it that M. des Amis always scored against him at least two hit for every one of his own. So much he would grant to discretion, but no more. He desired that M. des Amis should be conscious of his strength, without, however, discovering so much of its real extent as would have excited in him an unnecessary degree of jealousy.

And so well did he contrive, that whilst he became ever of greater assistance to the master—for his style and general fencing, too, had materially improved—he was also a source of pride to him as the most brilliant of all the pupils that had ever passed through his academy. Never did André-Louis disillusion him by revealing the fact that his skill was due far more to M. des Amis's library and his own mother wit than to any lessons received.

CHAPTER II

QUOS DEUS VULT PERDERE

ONCE again, precisely as he had done when he joined the Binet Troupe, did André-Louis now settle down whole-heartedly to the new profession into which necessity had driven him, and in which he found effective concealment from those who might seek him to his hurt.

This profession might—although, in fact, it did not—have brought him to consider himself at last as a man of action. He had not, however, on that account, ceased to be a man of thought, and the events of the spring and summer-months of that year 1789 in Paris provided him with abundant matter for reflection. He read there in the *raw* what is perhaps the most amazing page in the history of human development, and in the end he was forced to the conclusion that all his early preconceptions had been at fault, and that it was such exalted passionate enthusiasts as Vilmorin who had been right.

I suspect him of actually taking pride in the fact that he had been mistaken, complacently attributing his error to the circumstance that he had been, himself, of too sane and logical a mind to gauge the depths of human insanity now revealed.

He watched the growth of hunger, the increasing poverty and distress of Paris during that spring, and assigned it to its proper cause, together with the patience with which the people bore it. The world of France was in a state of hushed, of paralysed expectancy. The States General were about to assemble, the States General which were to restore the finances, redress all grievances, abolish abuses, and deliver the great nation from the bondage in which it was held by an arrogant minority of some four per centum of its population. And because of this expectancy, industry had come to a standstill, the stream of trade had dwindled to a trickle. Men would not buy or sell until they saw clearly the means by which the genius of the Swiss banker, M. Necker, was to deliver them from this morass. And because of this paralysis of affairs the men of the people were thrown out of work and left to starve with their wives and children.

Looking on, André-Louis smiled grimly. So far he was right. The sufferers were ever the proletariat. The men who sought to make this revolution, the electors—here in Paris as elsewhere—were men of substance, notable bourgeois, wealthy traders. And whilst these, despising the canaille and envying the privileged, talked largely of equality—by which they meant an ascending equality that should confuse themselves with the gentry—the proletariat perished of want in its kennels.

At last with the month of May the deputies arrived, André-Louis's friend, Le Chapelier, prominent amongst them, and the States General were inaugurated at Versailles. It was then that affairs began to become interesting, then that André-Louis began seriously to doubt the soundness of the views he had held hitherto.

When the royal proclamation had gone forth decreeing that the deputies of the Third Estate should number twice as many

as those of the other two orders together, André-Louis had believed that the preponderance of votes thus assured to the Third Estate rendered inevitable the reforms to which they had pledged themselves.

But he had reckoned without the power of the privileged orders over the proud Austrian Queen, and her power over the obese, phlegmatic, irresolute monarch. That the privileged orders should deliver battle in defence of their privileges, André-Louis could understand. Man being what he is, and labouring under his curse of acquisitiveness, will never willingly surrender possessions, whether they be justly or unjustly held. But what surprised André Louis was the unutterable crassness of the methods by which the Privileged ranged themselves for battle. They opposed brute force to reason and philosophy, and battalions of foreign mercenaries to ideas. As if ideas were to be impaled on bayonets!

"It is clear," he writes, "that each and all of them were just so many Tours d'Azyr. I had never realised that his species swarmed so thickly in France. The noblesse might almost be symbolised by a swaggering bully ready to run a sword through the entrails of any who opposed him. And the method! After the farce of that first Assembly the Third were left to themselves, to meet daily in the Salle des Menus Plaisirs at Versailles, unable to proceed because the Privileged would not join them for the common and public verification of powers which was necessary as a preliminary to the business of making a constitution. Privilege fatuously imagined that by this inaction it would compel the Third to decay and disintegrate. Already it found a deal of amusement with which to excite the laughter of the Comité Polignac that ruled the foolish Queen, in the absurd spectacle of the Third Estate thus checkmated and impotent at the outset."

That was the beginning of the war between the Privileged and the Court on one side, and the Assembly and the People on the other.

The Third contained itself, and waited; waited with the patience of nature; waited a month whilst with the paralysis of business now complete the skeleton hand of famine took a firmer grip of Paris; waited a month whilst Privilege gradually assembled an army in Versailles to intimidate it—an army of fifteen regiments, nine of which were Swiss and German—and mounted a park of artillery before the building in which the deputies sat. But the deputies refused to be intimidated; they refused to see the guns and foreign uniforms; they refused to see anything but the purpose for which they had been brought together by royal proclamation.

Thus until the 10th of June, when that great thinker and

metaphysician, the Abbé Siéyès, gave the signal. "It is time," said he, "to cut the cable."

On his motion, the preliminary action was taken of formally summoning the two absent orders to sit in common assembly with the Third Estate.

But Privilege—not seeing in its stupid tenacity of greed whither it was going, believing in force as the supreme law, and trusting to guns and foreign regiments—still refused to accede to the just and reasonable demand of a common assembly.

"It is said," Siéyès had written, "that the Third Estate alone cannot form States General. So much the better, it will compose a National Assembly."

This he now demanded should be done, and the Third, as representing ninety-six per centum of the nation, proceeded to do it. As a beginning the nobility and clergy were pronounced to be no more than two corporations nowise representative.

They willed it so, and they had it so.

The Œil de Bœuf was intensely amused. This Third was so droll in its fantastic contortions. The rejoinder was of the simplest. It consisted in closing the Hall of the Menus Plaisirs where the Assembly was held. How the gods must have laughed at those so reckless laughers! André-Louis certainly laughs as he writes of it.

"Again brute force against ideas. Again the manner of La Tour d'Azyr. The Assembly no doubt had too dangerous a gift of eloquence. But how to conceive that the closing of a hall is to cripple the deliberations of an assembly! Are there no other halls, or, failing halls, the broad canopy of heaven itself?"

The Third evidently thought so, for, finding the hall closed to them and guarded by soldiers who refused them admission, they repaired through the rain to the tennis-court, utterly destitute of furniture, and there announced (by way of revealing to the Court the futility of its measures against them) that wherever they are there the National Assembly was. Upon that they made their formidable oath not to separate until they had fulfilled the purpose for which they had been convoked, until they had given France a constitution—an oath very properly concluded amid shouts of "Vive le Roi!"

Thus a protest of loyalty to their King was mingled with a declaration to resist the vicious and corrupt system of which he was the unfortunate centre.

Le Chapelier best expressed that day precisely what was in the mind both of the Assembly and of the nation at large, harmonising their loyalty to the throne with their duty as citizens, when he moved "that His Majesty be informed that the

enemies of the country obsess the Throne, and that their counsels tend to place the monarchy at the head of a party."

Yet Privilege, as barren of invention as of foresight, contented itself with repeating its former tactics. M. le Comte d'Artois, having announced that on the morrow he would play tennis, the members of the Third found themselves on that Monday, the twentysecond of June, excluded from the tennis-court as on the Sunday they had been excluded from the Menus Plaisirs. This time, that errant, long-suffering Assembly which is to begin by giving bread to starving France must postpone its measures so that M. d'Artois may have his game of tennis. Yet M. le Comte does not, suffering from the general myopy, perceive the sinister aspect of his action. *Quos Deus vult perdere. . .* The Assembly moved patiently on, as it had done before, and found an asylum this time in the Church of Saint Louis.

And now those self-doomed humorists of the C il de B euf, driven by their petty insolence, prepare to push things to the length of bloodshed. If this National Assembly cannot understand a hint, it shall be given something plainer, something that it cannot possibly fail to understand. In vain does Necker try to build a bridge across the gulf; the King—unfortunate captive of Privilege—will have none of it. He insists—as no doubt was insisted with him that he should—that the three orders shall remain distinct. If they desire a reunion, he will permit it, but for this occasion only, and to treat only of general affairs, which general affairs do not comprise any matters concerning the respective rights of the three orders, the constitution of future States General, feudal and seigneurial property, or privileges pecuniary or honourable; in short, nothing that can alter the existing r gime, nothing of all that purpose by which the Third is inspired. The royal convocation of these States is revealed at last for an impudent mockery, a thing devised solely to mystify and to delude.

The Third, notified, repairs to the Menus Plaisirs to meet the other orders and hear the royal declaration. M. Necker is absent; the rumour runs that he is on the point of departure. Since Privilege will not use the bridge of his providing, he will certainly not remain to have it supposed from his presence that he approves the declaration to be made. How could he approve it, since it changes nothing? It declares that the King will sanction equality of taxation *if* the nobility and the clergy will renounce their pecuniary privileges; that property shall be respected, particularly tithes and feudal rights and dues; that on the question of individual liberty the States are invited to seek and to propose means that will reconcile the abolition of lettres-de-cachet with

the precautions necessary to spare the honour of families and to repress the beginnings of sedition; that in the matter of throwing State employment open equally to all, the King must refuse, particularly in so far as the army is concerned, in the institution of which it is not his wish to make the slightest modification—by which it is meant that the military career must remain a privilege of the noblesse, as hitherto, and that no man who is not nobly born may aspire to any rank above that of an under-officer.

And lest any doubts should linger in the minds of the already sufficiently disillusioned representatives of ninety-six per centum of the nation, comes from that sluggish, phlegmatic prince the challenge :

"If you abandon me in so beautiful an enterprise, I shall, alone, dispose for the welfare of my people; I shall consider myself, alone, their true representative."

And upon that he dismisses them :

"I order you, messieurs, to separate at once. To-morrow morning you will repair to the chambers assigned to your respective orders, there to resume your sittings."

And so His Majesty departs followed by Privilege—nobility and clergy. He returns to the Château to receive the acclamations of the *Œil de Bœuf*. And the Queen, radiant, triumphant, announces that she confides the fate of her son, the Dauphin, to the nobles. But the King does not share the enthusiasm that pervades the palace; he is morose and silent. The gelid silence of the people as he drove through their ranks—a silence to which he is not accustomed—has impressed him unfavourably. He will require a deal of stiffening from his evil counsellors before he will consent to be thrust onwards along the path of doom to which this day he has set his foot.

The gauntlet which he threw down in the Assembly has been taken up by the Third. When the master of the ceremonies comes to remind Bailly, its president, that the King has ordered the Third to depart, "It seems to me," he is answered, "that the Assembled Nation cannot receive orders."

And then that great man Mirabeau—massive of body as of genius—dismisses the master of ceremonies in a voice of thunder :

"We have heard the intentions that have been suggested to the King, and it is not for you, sir, who have here no place, or voice, or right to speak, to remind us of his words. Go back and tell those who sent you that we are here by the will of the people, and that we shall not leave save by force of bayonets."

That was to pick up the glove indeed. And the story runs that M. de Brézé, the young master of ceremonies in question,

was so stricken by that dismissal, by the majesty of the man, the majesty of the twelve hundred deputies silently facing him, that he went out backwards as if in the presence of royalty.

The crowd outside, learning of the turn of events, goes off furiously to the Château. Six thousand men flood the courtyards, storm the gardens and the terraces. The Queen's gaiety is checked by sudden fear. It is the first time such a thing has happened to her. But it shall not be the last; for she misses the warning it conveys. She shall know it again and again before the end, and ever in increasing quantity; but wisdom never. Yet now in her panic she begs the King quickly to undo that which she and her friends have done, and to recall the magician Necker, who alone can save the situation.

Fortunately the Swiss banker has not yet taken his departure. He is at hand. He comes down to the courtyard. He pacifies the people.

"Yes, yes, my children. Reassure yourselves. I will remain! I will remain!"

They kiss his hands as he moves through them, in tears deeply moved by this display of faith in him. Thus covering with his reputation for honesty the brutal stupidity of the cabal, he gains them a respite.

That was on the twenty-third of June. The news of it came quickly to Paris. Did it mean, wondered André-Louis, that the National Assembly had conquered, that the door would be opened to the reforms the need for which grew every day more desperate? He hoped it might be so, for Paris was becoming restive and ever hungrier. The queues outside the breadshops were daily increasing as bread grew daily more scarce, and accusations of gambling in corn flew recklessly and dangerously likely at any moment to precipitate grave trouble.

For two days nothing happened. The reconciliation was not confirmed; the royal declaration was not revoked. It began to look as if the Court would not keep faith. And then the electors of Paris took a hand. This body had concerted to continue to assemble after the elections, so as to complete the instructions of their elected deputies. They now proposed the formation of a civic guard, the organisation of an elective annual commune, and an address to the King petitioning the withdrawal of the troops assembled at Versailles, and the revocation of the royal declaration of the twenty-third. On that same day the soldiers of the French Guards broke out of barracks, and came to fraternise with the people in the Palais Royal, swearing to refuse to obey any order against the National Assembly. For this, eleven of them were placed under arrest by their Colonel, M. du Châtelet.

Meanwhile the petition of the electors was before the King. In addition to this, a minority of the nobles, with the self-seeking effete Duke of Orléans at their head, had of their own impules joined the National Assembly, to the great delight of Paris.

The King, urged to prudence by M. Necker, decided upon the reunion of the orders, which the National Assembly demanded. There was great joy at Versailles, and thus, apparently, the peace was made between Privilege and People. Had it been real all might have been well. But Privilege had not yet learnt its lesson; indeed, would never learn it until all was lost. The reunion was but a pretence, a mockery, made by the temporising nobles, who now—as was becoming obvious—but watched for an opportunity, awaited a pretext to resort to the force in which alone they believed.

And the opportunity came soon, at the very beginning of July. M. du Châtelet, a harsh, haughty disciplinarian, proposed to transfer the eleven French Guards placed under arrest from the military gaol of the Abbaye to the filthy prison of Bicêtre reserved for thieves and felons of the lowest order. Word of that intention going forth, the people at last met violence with violence. A mob of four thousand strong broke into the Abbaye, and delivered thence not only the eleven guardsmen, but all the other prisoners, with the exception of one whom they discovered to be a thief, and whom they put back again.

That was open revolt at last, and with revolt Privilege knew how to deal. It would strangle this mutinous Paris in the iron grip of the foreign regiments. Measures were quickly concerted. Old Maréchal de Broglie, a veteran of the Seven Years' War, imbued with a soldier's contempt for civilians, conceiving that the sight of a uniform would be enough to restore peace and order, took control with Besenval as his second-in-command. The foreign regiments were stationed in the environs of Paris, regiments whose very names were an irritation to the Parisians, regiments of Reisbach, of Diesbach, of Nassau, Esterhazy, and Roehmer. Reinforcements of Swiss were sent to the Bastille, between whose crenels already since the thirtieth of June were to be seen the menacing mouths of loaded cannon.

On the tenth of July the electors once more addressed the King to request the withdrawal of the troops. They were answered next day that the troops served the purpose of defending the liberties of the Assembly! And on the next day to that, which was a Sunday, the philanthropist, Dr. Guillotin—whose philanthropic engine of painless death was before very long to find a deal of work—came from the Assembly, of which he was a member, to assure the electors of Paris that

all was well, appearances notwithstanding, since Necker was more firmly in the saddle than ever. He did not know that at the very moment in which he was speaking so confidently the oft-dismissed and oft-recalled M. Necker had just been dismissed yet again by the hostile cabal about the Queen. Privilege wanted conclusive measures, and conclusive measures it would have—conclusive to itself.

And at the same time yet another philanthropist, also a doctor, one Jean Paul Mara, of Italian extraction—better known as Marat, the gallicized form of name he adopted—a man of letters too, who had spent some years in England, and there published several works on sociology, was writing :

“Have a care! Consider what would be the fatal effect of a seditious movement. If you should have the misfortune to give way to that, you will be treated as people in revolt, and blood will flow.”

André-Louis was in the gardens of the Palais Royal—that place of shops and puppet-shows, of circus and cafés, of gaming-houses and brothels, that universal rendezvous—on that Sunday morning when the news of Necker’s dismissal spread dismay and fury.

He beheld a slight young man with a pock-marked face redeemed from utter ugliness by a pair of magnificent eyes leap to a table outside the Café de Foy, a drawn sword in his hand, crying “To arms!” And then upon the silence of astonishment which that cry imposed, this young man poured a flood of inflammatory eloquence, in a voice marred at moments by a stutter. He told the people that the Germans on the Champ de Mars would enter Paris that night to butcher the inhabitants. “Let us mount a cockade!” he cried, and tore a leaf from a tree to serve his purpose—the green cockade of hope.

Enthusiasm swept the crowd, a motley crowd made up of men and women of every class, from vagabond to nobleman, from harlot to lady of fashion. Trees were despoiled of their leaves, and the green cockade was flaunted from almost every head.

“You are caught between two fires,” the incendiary’s stuttering voice raved on. “Between the Germans on the Champ de Mars and the Swiss in the Bastille. To arms, then! To arms!”

Excitement boiled up, and over. From a neighbouring waxworks show came the bust of Necker, and presently a bust of that comedian the Duke of Orléans, who had a party and who was as ready as any other of the budding opportunists

of those days to take advantage of the moment for his own aggrandisement. The bust of Necker was draped with crêpe.

André-Louis looked on, and grew afraid. Marat's pamphlet had impressed him. It had expressed what himself he had expressed more than half a year ago to the mob at Rennes. This crowd, he felt, must be restrained. That hot-headed, irresponsible stutrer would have the town in a blaze by night unless something were done. The young man, a causeless advocate of the Palais named Camille Desmoulins, later to become famous, leapt down from his table still waving his sword, still shouting: "To arms! Follow me!" André-Louis advanced to occupy the improvised rostrum which the stutrer had just vacated, to make an effort at counteracting that inflammatory performance. He thrust through the crowd, and came suddenly face to face with a tall man, beautifully dressed, whose handsome countenance was sternly set, whose great sombre eyes smouldered as if with suppressed anger.

Thus face to face, each looking into the eyes of the other, they stood for a long moment, the jostling crowd streaming past them, unheeded. Then André-Louis laughed.

"That fellow, too, has a very dangerous gift of eloquence, M. le Marquis," he said. "In fact there are a number of such in France to-day. They grow from the soil, which you and yours have irrigated with the blood of the martyrs of liberty. Soon it may be your blood instead. The soil is parched, and thirsty for it."

"Gallows-bird," he was answered. "The police will do your affair for you. I shall tell the Lieutenant-General that you are to be found in Paris."

"My God, man!" cried André-Louis, "will you never get sense? Will you talk like that of Lieutenant-Generals when Paris itself is likely to tumble about your ears or take fire under your feet? Raise your voice, M. le Marquis. Denounce me here, to these. You will make a hero of me in such an hour as this. Or shall I denounce you? I think I will. I think it is high time you received your wages. Hi! You others, listen to me! Let me present you to . . ."

A rush of men hurtled against him, swept him along with them, do what he would, separating him from M. de La Tour d'Azyr, so oddly met. He sought in vain to breast that human torrent; the Marquis, caught in an eddy of it, remained where he had been, and André-Louis's last glimpse of him was of a man smiling with tight lips, an ugly smile.

Meanwhile, the gardens were emptying in the wake of that stuttering firebrand who had mounted the green cockade,

The human torrent poured into the Rue de Richelieu, and André-Louis perforce must suffer himself to be borne along by it, at least as far as the Rue du Hasard. There he sidled out of it, and having no wish to be crushed to death or to take further part in the madness that was afoot, he slipped down the street, and so got home to the deserted academy. For there were no pupils to-day, and even M. des Amis, like André-Louis, had gone out to seek for news of what was happening at Versailles.

This was no normal state of things at the academy of Bertrand des Amis. Whatever else in Paris might have been at a standstill ately, the fencing academy had flourished as never hitherto. Usually both the master and his assistant were busy from morning until dusk, and André-Louis was being paid now by the lessons that he gave, the master allowing him one half of the fee in each case for himself, an arrangement that the assistant found profitable. On Sundays the academy made half holiday; but on this Sunday, such had been the state of suspense and ferment in the city that no one having appeared by eleven o'clock, both des Amis and André-Louis had gone out. Little they thought, as they lightly took leave of each other—they were very good friends by now—that they were never to meet again in this world.

Boodshed there was that day in Paris. On the Place Vendôme a detachment of dragoons awaited the crowd out of which André-Louis slipped. The horsemen swept down upon the mob, dispersed it, smashed the waxed effigy of M. Necker, and killed one man on the spot—an unfortunate French Guard who stood his ground. That was a beginning. As a consequence Besenval brought up his Swiss from the Champ de Mars and marshalled them in battle order on the Champs Elysées with four pieces of artillery. His dragoons he stationed in the Place Louis XV.

That evening an enormous crowd, streaming along the Champs Elysées and the Tuileries Gardens, considered with eyes of alarm that warlike preparation. Some insults were cast upon those foreign mercenaries and some stones were flung. Besenval, losing his head, or acting under orders, sent for his dragoons and ordered them to disperse the crowd. But that crowd was too dense to be dispersed in this fashion; so dense that it was impossible for the horsemen to move without crushing someone. There were several crushed, and as a consequence, when the dragoons, led by the Prince de Lambesc, advanced into the Tuileries Gardens, the outraged crowd met them with a fusillade of stones and bottles. Lambesc gave the order to fire. There was a stampede. Pouring forth from the

Tuileries through the city went those indignant people with their story of German cavalry trampling upon women and children, and uttering now in grimmest earnest the call to arms, raised at noon by Desmoulins in the Palais Royal.

The victims were taken up and borne thence, and among them was Bertrand des Amis, himself—like all who lived by the sword—an ardent upholder of the noblesse, trampled to death under hooves of foreign horsemen launched by the noblesse and led by a nobleman.

To André-Louis, waiting that evening on the second floor of No. 13 Rue du Hasard for the return of his friend and master, four men of the people brought the broken body of one of the earliest victims of the Revolution that was now launched in earnest.

CHAPTER III

PRESIDENT LE CHAPELIER

THE ferment of Paris, which during the two following days resembled an armed camp rather than a city, delayed the burial of Bertrand des Amis until the Wednesday of that eventful week. Amid events that were shaking a nation to its foundations the death of a fencing-master passed almost unnoticed even among his pupils, most of whom did not come to the academy during the two days that his body lay there. Some few, however, did come, and these conveyed the news to others, with the result that the master was followed to Père La Chaise by a score of young men, at the head of whom as chief mourner walked André-Louis.

There were no relatives to be advised so far as André-Louis was aware, although within a week of M. des Amis's death a sister turned up from Passy to claim his heritage. This was considerable, for the master had prospered and saved money, most of which was invested in the Campagnie des Eaux and the National Debt. André-Louis consigned her to the lawyers, and saw her no more.

The death of des Amis left him with so profound a sense of loneliness and desolation, that he had no thought or care for the sudden access of fortune which it automatically procured him. To the master's sister might fall such wealth as he had

amassed, but André-Louis succeeded to the mine itself from which that wealth had been extracted—the fencing-school, in which by now he was himself so well established as an instructor that its numerous pupils looked to him to carry it forward successfully as its chief. And never was there a season in which fencing academies knew such prosperity as in these troubled days, when every man was sharpening his sword and schooling himself in the uses of it.

It was not until a couple of weeks later that André-Louis realised what had really happened to him, and he found himself at the same time an exhausted man, for during that fortnight he had been doing the work of two. If he had not hit upon the happy expedient of pairing off his more advanced pupils to fence with each other, himself standing by to criticise, correct, and otherwise instruct, he must have found the task utterly beyond his strength. Even so, it was necessary for him to fence some six hours daily, and every day he brought arrears of lassitude from yesterday, until he was in danger of succumbing under the increasing burden of fatigue. In the end he took an assistant to deal with beginners, who gave the hardest work. He found him readily enough by good fortune in one of his own pupils named Le Duc. As the summer advanced, and the con-course of pupils steadily increased, it became necessary for him to take yet another assistant—an able young instructor named Galoche—and another room on the floor above.

They were strenuous days for André-Louis, more strenuous than he had ever known, even when he had been at work to build up the Binet Company; but it follows that they were days of extraordinary prosperity. He comments regretfully upon the fact that Bertrand des Amis should have died by ill-chance on the very eve of so profitable a vogue of sword-play.

The arms of the Académie du Roi, to which André-Louis had no title, still continued to be displayed outside his door. He had overcome the difficulty in a manner worthy of Scaramouche. He left the escutcheon and the legend "*Académies de Bertrand des Amis, Maître en fait d'Armes des Académies du Roi*," appending to it the further legend: "*Conducted by André-Louis.*"

With little time now in which to go abroad, it was from his pupils and the newspapers—of which a flood had risen in Paris with the establishment of the freedom of the Press—that he learnt of the revolutionary processes around him, following upon, as a measure of anti-climax, the fall of the Bastille. That had happened whilst M. des Amis lay dead, on the day before they buried him, and was indeed the chief reason of his burial's

delay. It was an event that had its inspiration in that ill-considered charge of Prince Lambesc in which the fencing-master had been killed.

The outraged people had besieged the electors in the Hôtel de Ville, demanding arms with which to defend their lives from these foreign murderers hired by despotism. And in the end the electors had consented to give them arms, or rather—for arms it had none to give—to permit them to arm themselves. Also they had given them a cockade, of red and blue, the colours of Paris. Because these colours were also those of the liveries of the Duke of Orléans, white was added to them—the white of the ancient standard of France—and thus was the tricolour born. Further, a permanent committee of electors was appointed to watch over public order.

Thus empowered, the people went to work with such good effect that within thirty-six hours sixty thousand pikes had been forged. At nine o'clock on Tuesday morning thirty thousand men were before the Invalides. By eleven o'clock they had ravished it of its store of arms, amounting to some thirty thousand muskets, whilst others had seized the Arsenal and possessed themselves of powder.

Thus they prepared to resist the attack that from seven points was to be launched that evening upon the city. But Paris did not wait for the attack. It took the initiative. Mad with enthusiasm, it conceived the insane project of seizing that terrible, menacing fortress the Bastille, and, what is more, it succeeded, as you know, before five o'clock that night, aided in the enterprise by the French Guards with cannon.

The news of it, borne to Versailles by Lambesc in flight with his dragoons before the vast armed force that had sprouted from the paving-stones of Paris, gave the Court pause. The people were in possession of the guns captured from the Bastille. They were erecting barricades in the streets and mounting these guns upon them. The attack had been too long delayed. It must be abandoned, since now it could lead only to fruitless slaughter that must further shake the already sorely shaken prestige of royalty.■

And so the Court, growing momentarily wise again under the spur of fear, preferred to temporise. Necker should be brought back yet once again; the three orders should sit united as the National Assembly demanded. It was the completest surrender of force to force—the only argument. The King went alone to inform the National Assembly of that eleventh-hour resolve, to the great comfort of its members, who viewed with pain and alarm the dreadful state of things in Paris. "No

force but the force of reason and argument " was their watchword, and it was so to continue for two years yet, with a patience and fortitude in the face of ceaseless provocation to which insufficient justice has been done.

As the King was leaving the Assembly, a woman, embracing his knees, gave tongue to what might well be the question of all France :

" Ah, sire, are you really sincere ? Are you sure they will not make you change your mind ? "

Yet no such question was asked when a couple of days later the King, alone and unguarded save by the representative of the nation, came to Paris to complete the peacemaking, the surrender of Privilege. The Court was filled with terror by the adventure. Were they not the " enemy," these mutinous Parisians ? And should a King go thus among his enemies ? If he shared some of that fear, as the gloom of him might lead us to suppose, he must have found it idle. What if two hundred thousand men under arms—men without uniforms and with the most extraordinary motley of weapons ever seen—awaited him ? They awaited him as a guard of honour.

Mayor Bailly at the barrier presented him with the keys of the city.

" These are the same keys that were presented to Henri IV. He had reconquered his people. Now the people have reconquered their King."

At the Hôtel de Ville Mayor Bailly offered him the new cockade, the tri-coloured symbol of constitutional France, and when he had given his royal confirmation to the formation of the Garde Bourgeoise and to the appointments of Bailly and Lafayette, he departed again for Versailles, amid the shouts of " Vive le Roi ! " from his loyal people.

And now you see Privilege—before the cannon's mouth, as it were—submitting at last, where had they submitted sooner they might have saved oceans of blood—chiefly their own. They come, nobles and clergy, to join the National Assembly, to labour with it upon this constitution that is to regenerate France. But the reunion is a mockery—as much a mockery as that of the Archbishop of Paris singing *Te Deum* for the fall of the Bastille—most grotesque and incredible of all these grotesque and incredible events. All that has happened to the National Assembly is that it has introduced five or six hundred enemies to hamper and hinder its deliberations.

But all this is an oft-told tale, to be read in detail elsewhere. I give you here just so much of it as I have found in André-Louis's own writings, almost in his own words, reflecting the

changes that were operated in his mind. Silent now, he came fully to believe in those things in which he had not believed when earlier he had preached them.

Meanwhile, together with the change in his fortune had come a change in his position towards the law, a change brought about by the other changes wrought around him. No longer need he hide himself. Who in these days would prefer against him the grotesque charge of sedition for what he had done in Brittany? What court would dare to send him to the gallows for having said in advance what all France was saying now? As for that other possible charge of murder, who should concern himself with the death of the miserable Binet killed by him—if, indeed, he had killed him, as he hoped—in self-defence?

And so one fine day in early August André-Louis gave himself a holiday from the academy, which was now working smoothly under his assistants, hired a chaise, and drove out to Versailles to the Café d'Amaury, which he knew for the meeting-place of the Club Bréton, the seed from which was to spring that Society of the Friends of the Constitution better known as the Jacobins. He went to seek Le Chapelier, who had been one of the founders of the club, a man of great prominence now, president of the Assembly in this important season when it was deliberating upon the declaration of the Rights of Man.

Le Chapelier's importance was reflected in the sudden servility of the shirt-sleeved, white-aproned waiter of whom André-Louis inquired for the representative.

Monsieur Le Chapelier was above-stairs with friends. The waiter desired to serve the gentleman, but hesitated to break in upon the assembly in which M. le Député found himself.

André-Louis gave him a piece of silver to encourage him to make the attempt. Then he sat down at a marble-topped table by the window looking out over the wide tree-encircled square. There, in that common-room of the café, deserted at this hour of mid-afternoon, the great man came to him. Less than a year ago he had yielded precedence to André-Louis in a matter of delicate leadership; to-day he stood on the heights, one of the great leaders of the nation in travail, and André-Louis was deep down in the shadows of the general mass.

The thought was in the minds of both as each scanned the other, each noting in the other the marked change that a few months had wrought. In Le Chapelier, André-Louis observed certain heightened refinements of dress that went with certain subtler refinements of countenance. He was thinner than of old, his face was pale, and there was a weariness in the eyes that considered his visitor through a gold-rimmed spy-glass.

In André-Louis those jaded but quick-moving eyes of the Bréton deputy noted changes even more marked. The almost constant swordsmanship of these last months had given André-Louis a grace of movement, a poise and a curiously indefinable air of dignity, of command. He seemed taller by virtue of this, and he was dressed with an elegance which, if quiet, was none the less rich. He wore a small silver-hilted sword, and wore it as if used to it, and his black hair that Le Chapelier had never seen other than fluttering lank about his bony cheeks was glossy now and gathered into a club. Almost he had the air of a *petit maître*.

In both, however, the changes were purely superficial, as each was soon to reveal to the other. Le Chapelier was ever the same direct and downright Bréton, abrupt of manner and of speech. He stood smiling a moment in mingled surprise and pleasure, then opened wide his arms. They embraced under the awe-stricken gaze of the waiter, who at once effaced himself.

"André-Louis, my friend! Whence do you drop?"

"We drop from above. I come from below to survey at close quarters one who is on the heights."

"On the heights! But that you willed it so, it is yourself might now be standing in my place."

"I have a poor head for heights, and I find the atmosphere too rarefied. Indeed, you look none too well on it yourself, Isaac. 'You are pale.'"

"The Assembly was in session all last night. That is all. These damned Privileged multiply our difficulties. They will do so until we decree their abolition."

They sat down. "Abolition! You contemplate so much? Not that you surprise me. You have always been an extremist."

"I contemplate it that I may save them. I seek to abolish them officially, so as to save them from abolition of another kind at the hands of a people they exasperate."

"I see. And the King?"

"The King is the incarnation of the nation. We shall deliver him together with the nation from the bondage of Privilege. Our constitution will accomplish it. You agree?"

André-Louis shrugged. "Does it matter? I am a dreamer in politics, not a man of action. Until lately, I have been very moderate; more moderate than you think. But now almost I am a republican. I have been watching, and I have perceived that this King is—just nothing, a puppet who dances according to the hand that pulls the string."

"This King, you say? What other king is possible? You He surely not of those who weave dreams about Orléans? hear as a sort of party, a following largely recruited by the

popular hatred of the Queen and the known fact that she detests him. There are some who have thought of making him Regent, some even more ; Robespierre is of the number."

"Who?" asked André-Louis, to whom the name was unknown.

"Robespierre—a preposterous little lawyer who represents Arras, a shabby, clumsy, timid dullard, who will make speeches through his nose to which nobody listens—an ultra-royalist whom the royalists and the Orléanists are using for their own ends. He has pertinacity, and he insists upon being heard. He may be listened to some day. But that he, or the others, will ever make anything of Orléans . . . pish! Orléans himself may desire it, but . . . the man is a eunuch in crime; he would, but he can't. The phrase is Mirabeau's."

He broke off to demand André-Louis's news of himself.

"You did not treat me as a friend when you wrote to me," he complained. "You gave me no clue to your whereabouts; you represented yourself as on the verge of destitution and withheld from me the means to come to your assistance. I have been troubled in mind about you, André. Yet, to judge by your appearance, I might have spared myself that. You seem prosperous, assured. Tell me of it."

André-Louis told him frankly all that there was to tell.

"Do you know that you are an amazement to me?" said the deputy. "From the robe to the buskin, and now from the buskin to the sword! What will be the end of you, I wonder?"

"The gallows, probably."

"Pish! Be serious. Why not the toga of the senator in senatorial France? It might be yours now if you had willed it so."

"The surest way to the gallows of all," laughed André-Louis.

At the moment Le Chapelier manifested impatience. I wonder did the phrase cross his mind that day four years later when he himself rode in the death-cart to the Grève?

"We are sixty-six Breton deputies in the Assembly. Should a vacancy occur, will you act as suppléant? A word from me, together with the influence of your name in Rennes and Nantes, and the thing is done."

André-Louis laughed outright. "Do you know, Isaac, that I never meet you but you seek to thrust me into politics?"

"Because you have a gift for politics. You were born for politics."

"Ah, yes—Scaramouche in real life. I've played it on the stage. Let that suffice. Tell me, Isaac, what news of my old friend, La Tour d'Azyr?"

"He is here in Versailles, damn him—a thorn in the flesh of the Assembly. They've burnt his château at La Tour d'Azyr. Unfortunately he wasn't in it at the time. The flames haven't even singed his insolence. He dreams that when this philosophic aberration is at an end there will be serfs to rebuild it for him."

"So there has been trouble in Brittany?" André-Louis had become suddenly grave, his thoughts swinging to Gavrillac.

"An abundance of it, and elsewhere too. Can you wonder? These delays at such a time, with famine in the land? Châteaux have been going up in smoke during the last fortnight. The peasants took their cue from the Parisians, and treated every castle as a Bastille. Order is being restored there as here, and they are quieter now."

"What of Gavrillac? Do you know?"

"I believe all to be well. M. de Kercadiou was not a Marquis de La Tour d'Azyr. He was in sympathy with his people. It is not likely that they would injure Gavrillac. But don't you correspond with your godfather?"

"In the circumstances—no. What you tell me would make it now more difficult than ever, for he must account me one of those who helped to light the torch that has set fire to so much belonging to his class. Ascertain for me that all is well, and let me know."

"I will, at once."

At parting, when André-Louis was on the point of stepping into his cabriolet to return to Paris, he sought information on another matter.

"Do you happen to know if M. de La Tour d'Azyr has married?" he asked.

"I don't; which really means that he hasn't. One would have heard of it in the case of that exalted Privileged."

"To be sure." André-Louis spoke indifferently. "*Au revoir*, Isaac! You'll come and see me—13, Rue du Hasard. Come soon."

"As soon and as often as my duties will allow. They keep me chained here at present."

"Poor slave of duty with your gospel of liberty!"

"True! And because of that I will come. I have a duty to Brittany: to make Omnes Omnibus one of her representatives in the National Assembly."

"That is a duty you will oblige me by neglecting," laughed André-Louis, and drove away.

CHAPTER IV

INTERLUDE

A FEW days later Le Chapelier returned André-Louis's visit. He came to the Rue du Hasard with definite news that all was well at Gavrillac, and that the people of M. de Kercadiou had taken no part in the recent provincial disturbances, now happily quelled.

And now, save that the pinch of want was still being felt by the poor, and that the queues outside the bakers' shops increased as the autumn advanced, life resumed its habitual course. Naturally there were constant explosions of feeling in Paris, but the Parisians were becoming accustomed to living in an explosive atmosphere, and they no longer permitted it seriously to interfere with their affairs and their amusements. Even those explosions might have been avoided, but that Privilege determined to fight to the last ditch, still offered a stubborn resistance on one side, even whilst on the other it was already flinging great offerings on the altar of the fatherland. In the coming of the regiment of Flanders to Versailles in September the people saw a new menace, perceived in it a sign that Privilege was rearing again its hideous greedy head. There was a plot afoot to coerce them, to starve them at need into submission. Hence that excursion, so-called of Mænads, that march to Versailles of the market-women of Paris, led by the unique Maillard, and as an outcome in early October, the Palace of the Tuileries was cleared of all the vermin, human and otherwise, that infested it, to make room for the King. The King was to come and live among his people. His loving people desired to have him in their midst—as a hostage for their own safety. If they must starve, he should starve with them.

André-Louis observed these things, and began to wonder where they would end. The only sane nobles appeared to him to be those who had crossed the frontier before the hot-heads constituting the large majority of their party should have brought destruction upon the whole class. Meanwhile, he, himself, was kept busy in his flourishing academy; so busy that he contemplated acquiring the ground-floor of No. 13 and a third assistant; he was restrained, however, by the impossibility of inducing the ground-floor tenant, a haberdasher who thrived on the custom of the fencing-school upstairs, to evacuate such advantageous premises.

With that exception the whole of No. 13 was now in his hands. He had lately acquired the first floor, converting it into a comfortable dwelling for himself and his two assistants, installing a housekeeper and a boy as page.

Now that the National Assembly sat in Paris he frequently saw Le Chapelier, and the intimacy grew between them. They commonly dined together at the Palais Royal or elsewhere and through Le Chapelier André-Louis began to make a few friends ; but he avoided the salons to which he was freely invited, those salons in which the fine new republican and philosophic spirit presided.

He was present at the Comédie Française one night in the following spring when Chénier's *Charles IX* was being performed more or less under protest.

It was a stormy evening. Allusions from the stage were taken up now by one section, now by another, of the audience, to be used as catch-words between the politically hostile parties between the old régime and the new. The climax was ludicrously provided by some men in the pit, who insisted upon remaining covered. The Comédie Française contained a royal box, and it was an unwritten law that respect for royalty should go the length of demanding bared heads even when this royal box was untenanted.

The men who chose to remain covered did so as a republican protest against what they considered an empty sham. But, before the storm that arose when their action was denounced, before an uproar that rendered inaudible a word from the stage, they made haste to beat a retreat from their republican arrogance—with one exception. One man stubbornly remained covered, and turned about his broad leonine head to laugh at those who demanded that he should take off his hat, his great voice trumpeting through the house : " Do you imagine that you can force me to take off my hat ? "

It was the last provocation. Menaces were hurled at him. He rose to them undaunted, heaved himself up, displaying an enormous athletic frame, a Herculean neck bare to the breast below his broad, unspeakably hideous countenance. He laughed in their faces. He pressed his round headgear down more securely about his brows.

" Firm as the hat of Servandony ! " he mocked them, and flourished an arm in defiance.

André-Louis laughed. There was something at once grotesque and magnificently heroic about that great figure, mocking and undaunted amid the ever increasing uproar. The affair might have ended badly had not the police intervened to arrest him and

lead him out a prisoner. He was clearly not of those who yield.

"Who is he?" André-Louis asked of a neighbour, as the house was settling down again after the disorder.

"I don't know," he was answered. "I am told that his name is Danton, and that he is the president of the Cordeliers. He will come to a bad end, of course; madman, an original."

Next day it was the talk of Paris, floating for a moment on the surface of more serious matter. In the fencing academy nothing else was discussed but the *Comédie Française* and the quarrel between Talma and Naudet that was at the root of all the mischief. But soon André-Louis had something else to engage his attention. He received a visit from Le Chapelier just before noon.

"I have news for you, André. Your godfather is at Meudon. He arrived there two days ago. Had you heard?"

"But no. How should I hear? Why is he at Meudon?" He was conscious of a faint excitement, which he could hardly have explained.

"I don't know. There have been fresh disturbances in Brittany. It may be due to that."

"And so he has come for shelter to his brother?" asked André-Louis.

"To his brother's house, yes; but not to his brother. Where do you live at all, André? Do you never hear any of the news? Étienne de Gavrillac emigrated months ago. He was of the household of M. d'Artois, and he crossed the frontier with him. By now, no doubt, he is in Germany with him, conspiring against France. For that is what the émigrés are doing. That Austrian woman at the Tuileries will end by destroying the monarchy."

"Yes, yes," said André-Louis, impatiently. Politics interested him not at all this morning. "But about Gavrillac?"

"Why, haven't I told you that Gavrillac is at Meudon, installed in the house his brother has left? Dieu de Dieu! Don't I speak French? I believe that Rabouillet, his intendant, is in charge of Gavrillac. I have brought you the news the moment I received it. I thought you would probably wish to go out to Meudon."

"Of course. I will go at once—that is, as soon as I can. I can't to-day, nor yet to-morrow. I am too busy here." He waved a hand towards the inner room, whence proceeded the click-click of blades, the quick moving of feet, and the voice of the instructor Le Duc.

"Well, well, that is your own affair. You are busy. I leave you now. Let us dine this evening at the *Café de Foy*. Kersain will be of the party."

"A moment!" André-Louis's voice arrested him on the

threshold. "Is Mademoiselle de Kercadiou with her uncle?"

"How the devil should I know? Go and find out!"

He was gone, and André-Louis stood there a moment deep in thought. Then he turned and went back to resume with his pupil, the Vicomte de Villeniort, the interrupted exposition of the demi-contre of Danet, illustrating with a small-sword the advantages to be derived from its adoption.

Thereafter he fenced with the Vicomte, who was perhaps the ablest of his pupils at the time, and all the while his thoughts were on the heights of Meudon, his mind casting up the lessons he had to give that afternoon and on the morrow, and wondering which of these he might postpone without deranging the academy. When having touched the Vicomte three times in succession, he paused and wrenched himself back to the present, it was to marvel at the precision to be gained by purely mechanical action. Without bestowing a thought upon what he was doing, his wrist and arm and knees had automatically performed their work, like the accurate fighting engine into which constant practice or a year and more had combined them.

Not until Sunday was André-Louis able to satisfy a wish that had meanwhile grown to the proportions of a yearning. Dressed with more than ordinary care, his head elegantly coiffed—by one of those hairdressers to the nobility of whom so many were being thrown out of employment by the stream of emigration which was now flowing freely—André-Louis mounted his hired carriage, and drove out to Meudon.

The house of the younger Kercadiou no more resembled that of the head of the family than did his person. A man of the Court, where his brother was essentially a man of the soil, an officer of the household of M. le Comte d'Artois, he had built for himself and his family an imposing villa on the heights of Meudon in a miniature park, conveniently situated for him midway between Versailles and Paris, and easily accessible from either. M. d'Artois—the royal tennis-player—had been amongst the very first to emigrate. Together with the Condés, the Contis, the Polignacs, and others of the Queen's intimate council, old Marshal de Broglie and the Prince de Lambesc, who realised that their very names had become odious to the people, he had quitted France immediately after the fall of the Bastille. He had gone to play tennis beyond the frontier—and there consummate the work of ruining the French monarchy upon which he and those others had been engaged in France. With him, amongst several members of his household, went Étienne de Kercadiou, and with Étienne de Kercadiou went his family, a wife and four children. Thus it was that the Seigneur de Gavrillac, glad to escape from a province

so peculiarly disturbed as that of Brittany—where the nobles had shown themselves the most intransigent of all France—had come to occupy in his brother's absence the courtier's handsome villa at Meudon.

That he was quite happy there is not to be supposed. A man of his almost Spartan habits, accustomed to plain fare and self-help was a little uneasy in this sybaritic abode, with its soft carpets, profusion of gilding, and battalion of sleek, silent-footed servants—for Kercadiou the younger had left his entire household behind. Time, which at Gavrillac he had kept so fully employed in agrarian concerns, here hung heavily upon his hands. In self-defence he slept a great deal, and but for Aline, who made no attempt to conceal her delight at this proximity to Paris and the heart of things, it is possible that he would have beat a retreat almost at once from surroundings that sorted so ill with his habits. Later on, perhaps he would accustom himself and grow resigned to this luxurious inactivity. In the meantime the novelty of it fretted him, and it was into the presence of a peevish and rather somnolent M. de Kercadiou that André-Louis was ushered in the early hours of the afternoon of that Sunday in June.

CHAPTER V

AT MEUDON

HE was ushered unannounced, as had ever been the custom at Gavrillac. This because Benoît, M. de Kercadiou's old seneschal, had accompanied his seigneur upon this soft adventure, and was installed—to the ceaseless and but half-concealed hilarity of the impertinent valetaille that M. Étienne had left—as his maître d'hôtel here at Meudon.

Benoît had welcomed M. André with incoherencies of delight ; almost had he gambolled about him like some faithful dog, whilst conducting him to the salon and the presence of the Lord of Gavrillac, who would—in the words of Benoît—be ravished to see M. André again.

" Monseigneur ! Monseigneur ! " he cried, in a quavering voice, entering a pace or two in advance of the visitor. " It is M. André . . . M. André, your godson, who comes to kiss your hand. He is here . . . and so fine that you would hardly know him. He is here, monseigneur ! Is he not beautiful ? "

And the old servant rubbed his hands in conviction of the delight that he believed he was conveying to his master.

André-Louis crossed the threshold of that great room, soft-carpeted to the foot, dazzling to the eye. It was immensely lofty, and its festooned ceiling was carried on fluted pillars with gilded capitals. The door by which he entered, and the windows that opened upon the garden, were of an enormous height—almost, indeed, the full height of the room itself. It was a room prodigally gilded with an abundance of ormolu incrustations on the furniture, in which it nowise differed from what was customary in the dwellings of people of birth and wealth. Never indeed was there a time in which so much gold was employed decoratively as in this age, when coined gold was almost unprocurable and paper money had been put into circulation to supply the lack. It was a saying of André-Louis's that if these people could only have been induced to put the paper on their walls and the gold into their pockets, the finances of the kingdom might soon have been in better case.

The Seigneur—furbished and beruffled to harmonise with his surroundings—had risen, startled by this exuberant invasion on the part of Benoît, who had been almost as forlorn as himself since their coming to Meudon.

"What is it? Eh?" His pale, short-sighted eyes peered at the visitor. "André!" said he, between surprise and sternness, and the colour deepened in his great pink face.

Benoît, with his back to his master, deliberately winked and grinned at André-Louis to encourage him not to be put off by any apparent hostility on the part of his godfather. That done, the intelligent old fellow discreetly effaced himself.

"What do you want here?" growled M. de Kercadiou.

"No more than to kiss your hand, as Benoît has told you, monsieur my godfather," said André-Louis, submissively, bowing his sleek black head.

"You have contrived without kissing it for two years."

"Do not, monsieur, reproach me with my misfortune."

The little man stood very stiffly erect, his disproportionately large head thrown back, his pale, prominent eyes very stern.

"Did you think to make your outrageous offence any better by vanishing in that heartless manner, by leaving us without knowledge of whether you were alive or dead?"

"At first it was dangerous—dangerous to my life—to disclose my whereabouts. Then for a time I was in need, almost destitute, and my pride forbade me, after what I had done and the view you must take of it, to appeal to you for help. Later . . ."

"Destitute?" The Siegneur interrupted. For a moment

his lip trembled. Then he steadied himself, and the frown deepened as he surveyed this very changed and elegant godson of his, noted the quiet richness of his apparel, the paste buckles and red heels to his shoes, the sword, hilted in mother-o'-pearl and silver, and the carefully-dressed hair that he had always seen hanging in wisps about his face. "At least you do not look destitute now," he sneered.

"I am not. I have prospered since. In that, monsieur, I differ from the ordinary prodigal, who returns only when he needs assistance. I return solely because I love you, monsieur—to tell you so. I have come at the very first moment after hearing of your presence here." He advanced. "Monsieur my godfather!" he said, and held out his hand.

But M. de Kercadiou remained unbending, wrapped in his cold dignity and resentment.

"Whatever tribulations you may have suffered or consider that you may have suffered, they are far less than your disgraceful conduct deserved, and I observe that they have nothing abated your impudence. You think that you have but to come here and say 'Monsieur my godfather!' and everything is to be forgiven and forgotten. That is your error. You have committed too great a wrong; you have offended against everything by which I hold, and against myself personally, by your betrayal of my trust in you. You are one of those unspeakable scoundrels who are responsible for this revolution."

"Alas, monsieur, I see that you share the common delusion. These unspeakable scoundrels but demanded a constitution, as was promised them from the Throne. They were not to know that the promise was insincere, or that its fulfilment would be balked by the privileged orders. The men who have precipitated this revolution, monsieur, are the nobles and the prelates."

"You dare—and at such a time as this—stand there and tell me that abominable lie! You dare to say that the nobles have made the revolution, when scores of them, following the example of M. le Duc d'Aiguillon, have flung their privileges, even their title-deeds, into the lap of the people! Or perhaps you deny it?"

"Oh no. Having wantonly set fire to their house, they now try to put it out by throwing water on it: and where they fail they put the entire blame on the flames."

"I see that you have come here to talk politics."

"Far from it. I have come, if possible, to explain myself. To understand is always to forgive. That is a great saying of Montaigne's. If I could make you understand . . ."

"You can't. You'll never make me understand how you came to ~~make~~ ^{render} yourself so odiously notorious in Brittany."

"Ah, not odiously, monsieur!"

"I say odiously—among those that matter. It is said even that you were Omnes Omnibus, though that I cannot, will not, believe."

"Yet it is true."

M. de Kercadiou choked. "And you confess it? You dare to confess it?"

"What a man dares to do, he should dare to confess—unless he is a coward."

"Oh, and to be sure you were very brave, running away each time after you had done the mischief; turning comedian to hide yourself; doing more mischief as a comedian: provoking a riot in Nantes; and then running away again, to become God knows what—something dishonest by the affluent look of you. My God, man! I tell you that in these past two years I have hoped that you were dead, and you profoundly disappoint me that you are not." He beat his hands together, and raised his shrill voice to call "Bénoît!" He strode away towards the fireplace, scarlet in the face, shaking with the passion into which he had wrought himself. "Dead, I might have forgiven you, as one who had paid for his evil and his folly. Living, I never can forgive you. You have gone too far. God alone knows where it will end."

"Bénoît, the door. M. André-Louis Moreau to the door."

The tone argued an irrevocable determination. Pale and self-contained, but with a queer pain at his heart, André-Louis heard that dismissal, saw Bénoît's white, scared face and shaking hands half-raised as if he were about to expostulate with his master. And then another voice, a crisp, boyish voice, cut in.

"Uncle!" it cried, a world of indignation and surprise in its pitch, and then: "André!" And this time a note almost of gladness, certainly of welcome, was blended with the surprise that still remained.

Both turned, half the room between them at the moment, and beheld Aline in one of the long open windows, arrested there in the act of entering from the garden, Aline in a milk-maid bonnet of the latest mode, though without any of the tri-colour embellishments that were so commonly to be seen upon them.

The thin lips of André's long mouth twisted into a queer smile. Into his mind had flashed the memory of their last parting. He saw himself again, burning with indignation upon the pavement of Nantes, looking after her carriage as it receded down the Avenue de Gigan.

She was coming towards him now with outstretched hands, heightened colour in her cheeks, a smile of welcome on her lips. He bowed low and kissed her hand in silence.

Then with a glance and a gesture she dismissed Benoît, and in her imperious fashion constituted herself André's advocate against the harsh dismissal which she had overheard.

"Uncle," she said, leaving André and crossing to M. de Kercadiou, "you make me ashamed of you! To allow a feeling of peevishness to overwhelm all your affection for André!"

"I have no affection for him. I had once. He chose to extinguish it. He can go to the devil; and please observe that I don't permit you to interfere."

"But if he confesses that he has done wrong . . ."

"He confesses nothing of the kind. He comes here to argue with me about these infernal Rights of Man. He proclaims himself unrepentant. He announces himself with pride to have been, as all Brittany says, the scoundrel who hid himself under the sobriquet of *Omnes Omnibus*. Is that to be condoned?"

She turned to look at André across the wide space that separated them.

"But is this really so? Don't you repent, André—not now that you see all the harm that has come?"

It was a clear invitation to him, a pleading to him to say that he repented, to make his peace with his godfather. For a moment it almost moved him. Then, considering the subterfuge unworthy, he answered truthfully, though the pain he was suffering rang in his voice.

"To confess repentance," he said, slowly, "would be to confess a monstrous crime. Don't you see that? Oh, monsieur, have patience with me; let me explain myself a little. You say that I am in part responsible for something of all this that has happened. My exhortations to the people at Rennes and twice afterwards at Nantes are said to have had their share in what followed there. It may be so. It would be beyond my power positively to deny it. Revolution followed and bloodshed. More may yet come. To repent implies a recognition that I have done wrong. How shall I say that I have done wrong, and thus take a share of the responsibility for all that blood upon my soul? I will be quite frank with you to show you how far indeed I am from repentance. What I did, I actually did against all my convictions at the time. Because there was no justice in France to move against the murderer of Philippe de Vilmorin I moved in the only way that I imagined could make the evil done recoil upon the hand that did it, and those other hands that had the power but not the spirit to punish. Since then I have come to

see that I was wrong, and that Philippe de Vilmorin and those who thought with him were in the right. A government in which there is no justice is an impossible government to emancipated man. I had imagined that whatever class were given power would abuse that power. I have come to see that the only guarantee against the abuse of power lies in a tenure of power governed by the people's will. Had I not come to see that, what to-day would be my position? I must lie crushed under the consciousness that in an insensate attempt to obtain vengeance I had perpetrated a wrong more unspeakable, far greater than the one I sought to avenge.

"You must realise, monsieur, that it is with sincerest thankfulness that I find I have done nothing calling for repentance; and that on the contrary, when France is given the inestimable boon of a constitution, as will shortly happen, I may take pride in having played my part in bringing about the conditions that have made this possible."

There was a pause. M. de Kercadiou's face turned from pink to purple.

"You have quite finished?" he said, harshly.

"If you have understood me, monsieur."

"Oh, I have understood you, and . . . and I beg that you will go."

André-Louis shrugged his shoulders and hung his head. He had come there so joyously, in such yearning, merely to receive a final dismissal. He looked at Aline. Her face was pale and troubled; but her wit failed to show her how she could come to his assistance. His excessive honesty had burnt all his boats.

"Very well, monsieur. Yet this I would ask you to remember after I am gone; I have not come to you as one seeking assistance, as one driven to you by need. I am no returning prodigal, as I have said. I am one who, needing nothing, asking nothing, master of his own destinies, has come to you, driven by affection only, urged by the love and gratitude he bears you and will continue to bear you."

"Ah, yes!" cried Aline, turning now to her uncle. Here at least was an argument in André's favour, thought she. "That is true. Surely that . . ."

Inarticulately he hissed her into silence, exasperated.

"Hereafter perhaps that will help you to think of me more kindly, monsieur."

"I see no occasion, sir, to think of you at all. Again, I beg that you will go."

André-Louis looked at Aline an instant, as if still hesitating.

She answered him by a glance at her furious uncle, a faint shrug and a lift of the eyebrows, dejection the while in her countenance.

It was as if she said: "You see his mood. There is nothing to be done."

He bowed with that singular grace the fencing-room had given him and went out by the door.

"Oh, it is cruel!" cried Aline, in a stifled voice her hands clenched, and she sprang to the window.

"Aline" her uncle's voice arrested her. "Where are you going?"

"But we do not know where he is to be found."

"Who wants to find the scoundrel?"

"We may never see him again?"

"That is most fervently to be desired."

Aline said "Ouf!" and went out by the window.

He called after her, imperiously commanding her return. But Aline—dutiful child—closed her ears lest she must disobey him, and sped light-footed across the lawn to the avenue, there to intercept the departing André-Louis.

As he came forth, wrapped in gloom, she stepped from the bordering trees into his path.

"Aline!" he cried, joyously almost.

"I did not want you to go like this. I couldn't let you," she explained herself. "I know him better than you do and I know that his great soft heart will presently melt. He will be filled with regret. He will want to send for you and he will not know where to send."

"You think that?"

"Oh, I know it. You arrive in a bad moment. He is peevish and cross-grained, poor man, since he came here. These soft surroundings are all so strange to him. He wearies himself away from his beloved Gavrilac, his hunting and tillage, and the truth is that in his mind he very largely blames you for what has happened—for the necessity, or, at least, the wisdom, of this change. Brittany, you must know, was becoming too unsafe. The château of La Tour d'Azyr, amongst others, was burnt to the ground some months ago. At any moment, given a fresh excitement, it may be the turn of Gavrilac. And for this and his present discomfort he blames you and your friends. But he will come round presently. He will be sorry that he sent you away like this—for I know that he loves you, André, in spite of all. I shall reason with him when the time comes. And then we shall want to know where to find you."

"At number 13, Rue du Hasard. The number is unlucky,

the name of the street appropriate Therefore both are easy to remember."

She nodded. "I will walk with you to the gates." And side by side now they proceeded at a leisurely pace down the long avenue in the June sunshine dappled by the shadows of the bordering trees. "You are looking well, André; and do you know that you have changed a deal? I am glad that you have prospered." And then abruptly changing the subject before he had time to answer her, she came to the matter uppermost in her mind.

"I have so wanted to see you in all these months, André. You were the only one who could help me; the only one who could tell me the truth, and I was angry with you for never having written to say where you were to be found."

"Of course you encouraged me to do so when last we met in Nantes."

"What? Still resentful?"

"I am never resentful. You should know that." He expressed one of his vanities. He loved to think himself a Stoic. "But I still bear the scar of a wound that would be the better for the balm of your retraction."

"Why, then, I retract, André. And now tell me . . ."

"Yes, a self-seeking retraction," said he. "You give me something that you may obtain something." He laughed quite pleasantly. "Well, well, command me."

"Tell me, André." She paused, as if in some difficulty, and then went on her eyes upon the ground: "Tell me—the truth of that event at the Feydau."

The request fetched a frown to his brow. He suspected at once the thought that prompted it. Quite simply and briefly he gave her his version of the affair.

She listened attentively. When he had done, she sighed, her face was very thoughtful.

"That is much what I was told," she said. "But it was added that M. de La Tour d'Azyr had gone to the theatre expressly for the purpose of breaking finally with La Binet. Do you know if that was so?"

"I don't; nor of any reason why it should be so. La Binet provided him the sort of amusement that he and his kind are for ever craving . . ."

"Oh, there was a reason," she interrupted him. "I was the reason. I spoke to Madame de Sautron. I told her that I would not continue to receive one who came to me contaminated in that fashion." She spoke of it with obvious difficulty her colour rising as he watched her half-averted face.

"Had you listened to me . . ." he was beginning when again she interrupted him.

"M. de Sautron conveyed my decision to him, and afterwards represented him to me as a man in despair, repentant, ready to give proofs—any proofs—of his sincerity and devotion to me. He told me that M. de La Tour d'Azyr had sworn to him that he would cut short that affair, that he would see La Binet no more. And then, on the very next day, I heard of his having all but lost his life in that riot at the theatre. He had gone straight from that interview with M. de Sautron, straight from those protestations of future wisdom, to La Binet. I was indignant. I pronounced myself finally. I stated definitely that I would not in any circumstances receive M. de La Tour d'Azyr again. And then they pressed this explanation upon me. For a long time I would not believe it."

"So that you believe it now," said André, quickly. "Why?"

"I have not said that I believe it now. But . . . but . . . neither can I disbelieve. Since we came to Meudon M. de La Tour d'Azyr has been here, and himself he has sworn to me that it was so."

"Oh, if M. de La Tour d'Azyr had sworn . . ." André Louis was laughing on a bitter note of sarcasm.

"Have you ever known him lie?" she cut in, sharply. That checked him. "M. de La Tour d'Azyr is, after all, a man of honour, and men of honour never deal in falsehood. Have you ever known him do so, that you should be justified of your sneer?"

"No," he confessed. Common justice demanded that he should admit that virtue at least in his enemy. "I have not known him to lie, it is true. His kind is too arrogant, too self-confident to have recourse to untruth. But I have known him to do things as vile . . ."

"Nothing is as vile," she interrupted, speaking from the code by which she had been reared. "It is for liars only—who are first cousins to thieves—that there is no hope. It is in falsehood only that there is real loss of honour."

"You are defending that satyr, I think," he said, frostily.

"I desire to be just."

"Justice may seem to you a different matter when at last you shall have resolved yourself to become Marquise de La Tour d'Azyr." He spoke bitterly.

"I don't think that I shall ever take that resolve."

"But you are still not sure—in spite of everything?"

"Can one ever be sure of anything in this world?"

"Yes. One can be sure of being foolish."

Either she did not hear or did not heed him.

"You do not of your own knowledge know that it was not as M. de La Tour d'Azyr asserts—that he went to the Feydau that night?"

"I don't," he admitted. "It is, of course possible. But does it matter?"

"It might matter. Tell me, what became of La Binet after all?"

"I don't know."

"You don't know?" She turned to consider him. "And yet you can say it with indifference! I thought . . . I thought you loved her, André."

"So I did for a little while. I was mistaken. It required a La Tour d'Azyr to disclose the truth to me. They have their uses, these gentlemen. They help stupid fellows like myself to perceive important truths. I was fortunate that revelation in my case preceded marriage. I can now look back upon the episode with equanimity and thankfulness for my near escape from the consequences of what was no more than an aberration of the senses. It is a thing commonly confused with love. The experience, as you see, was very instructive."

She looked at him in frank surprise.

"Do you know, André, I sometimes think that you have no heart."

"Presumably because I sometimes reveal intelligence. And what of yourself, Aline? What of your own attitude from the outset where M. de La Tour d'Azyr is concerned? Does that show heart? If I were to tell you what it really shows, we should end by quarrelling again, and God knows I can't afford to quarrel with you now. I . . . I shall take another way."

"What do you mean?"

"Why, nothing at the moment, for you are not in any danger of marrying that animal."

"And if I were?"

"Ah! In that case affection for you would discover to me some means of preventing it, unless . . ." He paused.

"Unless?" she demanded, challengingly, drawn to the full of her short height, her eyes imperious.

"Unless you could also tell me that you loved him," said he, simply, whereat she was as suddenly and most oddly softened. And then he added, shaking his head: "But that, of course, is impossible."

"Why?" she asked him, quite gently now.

"Because you are what you are, Aline—utterly good and pure and adorable. Angels do not mate with devils. His wife you might become, but never his mate, Aline—never."

They had reached the wrought iron gates at the end of the avenue. Through these they beheld the waiting yellow chaise which had brought André-Louis. From near at hand came the creak of other wheels, the beat of other hooves, and now another vehicle came in sight, and drew to a standstill beside the yellow chaise—a handsome equipage with polished mahogany panels on which the gold and azure of armorial bearings flashed brilliantly in the sunlight. A footman swung to earth to throw wide the gates; but in that moment the lady who occupied the carriage, perceiving Aline waved to her and issued a command.

CHAPTER VI

MADAME DE PLOUGASTEL

THE postilion drew rein, and the footman opened the door, letting down the steps and proffering his arm to his mistress to assist her to alight, since that was the wish she had expressed. Then he opened one wing of the iron gates and held it for her. She was a woman of something more than forty, who once must have been very lovely, who was very lovely still with the refining quality that age brings to some women. Her dress and carriage alike advertised great rank.

"I take my leave here, since you have a visitor," said André-Louis.

"But it is an old acquaintance of your own, André. You remember Madame la Countess de Plougastel?"

He looked at the approaching lady, whom Aline was now running forward to meet, and because she was named to him he recognised her. He must, he thought, had he but looked, have recognised her without prompting anywhere at any time, and this although it was some sixteen years since last he had seen her. The sight of her now brought it all back to him—a treasured memory that had never permitted itself to be entirely overlaid by subsequent events.

When he was a boy of ten, on the eve of being sent to school at Rennes, she had come on a visit to his godfather, who was

her cousin. It happened that at the time he was taken by Rabouillet to the Manor of Gavrillac, and there he had been presented to Madame de Plougastel. The great lady, in all the glory then of her youthful beauty, with her gentle cultured voice—so cultured that she had seemed to speak a language almost unknown to the little Bréton lad—and her majestic air of the great world, had scared him a little at first. Very gently she had allayed those fears of his, and by some mysterious enchantment she had completely enslaved his regard. He recalled now the terror in which he had gone to the embrace to which he was bidden, and the subsequent reluctance with which he had left those soft round arms. He remembered, too, how sweetly she had smelled, and the very perfume she had used, a perfume as of lilac—for memory is singularly tenacious in these matters.

For three days whilst she had been at Gavrillac he had gone daily to the manor, and so had spent hours in her company. A childless woman with the maternal instinct strong within her, she had taken this precociously intelligent wide-eyed lad to her heart.

"Give him to me, Cousin Quintin," he remembered her saying on the last of those days to his godfather. "Let me take him back with me to Versailles as my adopted child."

But the Seigneur had gravely shaken his head in silent refusal, and there had been no further question of such a thing. And then, when she said good-bye to him—the thing came flooding back to him now—there had been tears in her eyes.

"Think of me sometimes, André-Louis," had been her last words.

He remembered how flattered he had been to have won within so short a time the affection of this great lady. The thing had given him a sense of importance that had endured for months thereafter, finally to fade into oblivion.

But all was vividly remembered now upon beholding her again after sixteen years, profoundly changed and matured, the girl—for she had been no more in those old days—sunk in this worldly woman with the air of calm dignity and complete self-possession. Yet, he insisted, he must have known her anywhere again.

Aline embraced her affectionately, and then, answering the questioning glance with faintly raised eyebrows that Madame was directing towards Aline's companion :

"This is André-Louis," she said. "You remember André-Louis, madame ?"

Madame checked. André-Louis saw the surprise ripple over her face, taking with it some of her colour, leaving her for a moment breathless.

And then the voice—the well-remembered rich musical voice—richer and deeper now than of yore, repeated his name.

“André-Louis!”

Her manner of uttering it suggested that it awakened memories, memories perhaps of the departed youth with which it was associated. And she paused a long moment, considering him, a little wide-eyed, what time he bowed before her.

“But of course I remember him,” she said at last, and came towards him, putting out her hand. He kissed it dutifully, submissively, instinctively. “And this is what you have grown into?” she appraised him, and he flushed with pride at the satisfaction in her tone. He seemed to have gone back sixteen years, and to be again the little Bréton lad at Gavrilac. She turned to Aline. “How mistaken Quintin was in his assumptions. He would be pleased to see him again, would he not?”

“So pleased madame, that he has shown me the door,” said André-Louis.

“Ah!” She frowned, conning him still with those dark wistful eyes. “We must change that, Aline. He is of course very angry with you. But it is the way to make converts. I will plead for you, André-Louis. I am a good advocate.”

He thanked her, and took his leave.

“I leave my case in your hands with gratitude. My homage, madame.”

And so it happened that, in spite of his godfather's forbidding reception of him, the fragment of a song was on his lips as his yellow chaise whirled him back to Paris and the Rue du Hasard. That meeting with Madame de Plougastel had enheartened him; her promise to plead his case in alliance with Aline gave him assurance that all would be well.

That he was justified of this was proved when on the following Thursday towards noon his academy was invaded by M. de Kercadiou. Giles, the boy, brought him word of it, and, breaking off at once the lesson upon which he was engaged, he pulled off his mask and went as he was—in a charmois waistcoat buttoned to the chin and with his foil under his arm—to the modest salon below, where his godfather awaited him.

The florid little lord of Gavrilac stood almost defiantly to receive him.

“I have been over-persuaded to forgive you,” he announced

aggressively, seeming thereby to imply that he consented to this merely so as to put an end to tiresome importunities.

André-Louis was not misled. He detected a pretence adopted by the Seigneur so as to enable him to retreat in good order.

"My blessings on the persuaders, whoever they may have been. You restore me my happiness, monsieur my godfather."

He took the hand that was proffered and kissed it, yielding to the impulse of the unfailing habit of his boyish days. It was an act symbolical of his complete submission, re-establishing between himself and his godfather the bond of protected and protector, with all the mutual claims and duties that it carries. No mere words could more completely have made his peace with this man who loved him. M. de Kercadiou's face flushed a deeper pink, his lip trembled, and there was a huskiness in the voice that murmured :

"My dear boy!" Then he recollected himself, threw back his great head and frowned. His voice resumed its habitual shrillness. "You realise, I hope, that you have behaved damnably . . . damnably, and with the utmost ingratitude?"

"Does not that depend upon the point of view?" quoth André-Louis, but his tone was studiously conciliatory.

"It depends upon a fact; and not upon any point of view. Since I have been persuaded to overlook it, I trust that at least you have some intention of reforming."

"I . . . I will abstain from politics," said André-Louis, that being the utmost he could say with truth.

"That is something at least." His godfather permitted himself to be mollified, now that a concession—or a seeming concession—had been made to his just resentment.

"A chair, monsieur?"

"No, no. I have come to carry you off to pay a visit with me. You owe it entirely to Madame de Plougastel that I consent to receive you again. I desire that you come with me to thank her."

"I have my engagements here . . ." began André-Louis, and then broke off. "No matter! I will arrange it. A moment"; and he was turning away to re-enter the academy.

"What are your engagements? You are not by chance a fencing instructor?" M. de Kercadiou had observed the leather waistcoat and the foil tucked under André-Louis's arm.

"I am the master of this academy—the academy of the late Bertrand des Amis, the most flourishing school of arms in Paris to-day."

M. de Kercadiou's brows went up.

"And you are master of it?"

"Maître en fait d'armes. I succeeded to the academy upon the death of des Amis."

He left M. de Kercadiou to think it over, and went to make his arrangements and effect the necessary changes in his toilet.

"So that is why you have taken to wearing a sword," said M. de Kercadiou, as they climbed into his waiting carriage.

"That and the need to guard one's self in these times."

"And do you mean to tell me that a man who lives by what is, after all, an honourable profession, a profession mainly supported by the nobility, can at the same time associate himself with these peddling attorneys and low pamphleteers who are spreading dissension and insubordination?"

"You forget that I am a peddling attorney myself, made so by your own wishes, monsieur."

M. de Kercadiou grunted, and took snuff. "You say the academy flourishes?" he asked, presently.

"It does. I have two assistant instructors. I could employ a third. It is hard work."

"That should mean that your circumstances are affluent."

"I have reason to be satisfied. I have far more than I need."

"Then you'll be able to do your share in paying off this national debt," growled the nobleman, well-content that—as he conceived it—some of the evil André-Louis had helped to sow should recoil upon him.

Then the talk veered to Madame de Plougastel. M. de Kercadiou, André-Louis gathered, but not the reason for it, disapproved most strongly of this visit. But then Madame la Comtesse was a headstrong woman whom there was no denying, whom all the world obeyed. M. de Plougastel was at present absent in Germany, but would shortly be returning. It was an indiscreet admission, from which it was easy to infer that M. de Plougastel was one of those intriguing emissaries who came and went between the Queen of France and her brother the Emperor of Austria.

The carriage drew up before a handsome hotel in the Faubourg St. Denis, at the corner of the Rue Paradis, and they were ushered by a sleek servant into a little boudoir, all gilt and brocade, that opened upon a terrace above a garden that was a park in miniature. Here Madame awaited them. She rose, dismissing the young person who had been reading to her, and came forward with both hands outstretched to greet her cousin Kercadiou.

"I almost feared you would not keep your word," she said. "It was unjust. But then I hardly hoped that you would succeed in bringing him." And her glance, gentle, and smiling welcome upon him, indicated André-Louis.

The young man made answer with formal gallantry.

"The memory of you, madame, is too deeply imprinted on my heart for any persuasions to have been necessary."

"Ah, the courtier!" said Madame, and abandoned him her hand. "We are to have a little talk, André-Louis," she informed him, with a gravity that left him vaguely ill at ease.

They sat down, and for awhile the conversation was of general matters, chiefly concerned, however, with André-Louis, his occupations and his views. And all the while Madame was studying him attentively with those gentle, wistful eyes, until again that sense of uneasiness began to pervade him. He realised instinctively that he had been brought here for some purpose deeper than that which had been avowed.

At last, as if the thing had been concerted—and the clumsy Lord of Gavrillac was the last man in the world to cover his tracks—his godfather rose, and upon a pretext of desiring to survey the garden, sauntered through the windows on to the terrace, over whose white stone balustrade the geraniums trailed in a scarlet riot. Thence he vanished among the foliage below.

"Now we can talk more intimately," said Madame. "Come here, and sit beside me." She indicated the empty half of the settee she occupied.

André-Louis went obediently, but a little uncomfortably.

"You know," she said, gently, placing a hand upon his arm, "that you have behaved very ill, that your godfather's resentment is very justly founded?"

"Madame, if I knew that, I should be the most unhappy, the most despairing, of men." And he explained himself, as he had explained himself on Sunday to his godfather. "What I did, I did because it was the only means to my hand in a country in which justice was paralysed by Privilege to make war upon an infamous scoundrel who had killed my best friend—a wanton, brutal act of murder, which there was no law to punish. And as if that were not enough—forgive me if I speak with the utmost frankness, madame—he afterwards debauched the woman I was to have married."

"Ah, mon Dieu!" she cried out.

"Forgive me. I know that it is horrible. You perceive perhaps what I suffered, how I came to be driven. That last affair of which I am guilty—the riot that began in the Feydau

Theatre, and afterwards enveloped the whole city of Nantes, was provoked by this."

"Who was she, this girl?"

It was like a woman, he thought, to fasten upon the unessential.

"Oh, a theatre-girl, a poor fool of whom I have no regrets. La Binet was her name. I was a player at the time in her father's troupe. That was after the Rennes business, when it was necessary to hide from such justice as exists in France—the gallows' justice for unfortunates who are not 'born.' This added wrong led me to provoke a riot in the theatre."

"Poor boy," she said, tenderly. "Only a woman's heart can realise what you must have suffered; and because of that I can so readily forgive you. But now . . ."

"Ah, but you don't understand, madame. If to-day I thought that I had none but personal grounds for having lent a hand in the holy work of abolishing Privilege, I think I should cut my throat. My true justification lies in the insincerity of those who intended that the convocation of the States General should be a sham, mere dust in the eyes of the nation."

"Was it not, perhaps, wise to have been insincere in such a matter?"

He looked at her blankly.

"Can it ever be wise, madame, to be insincere?"

"Oh, indeed, it can; believe me, who am twice your age, and know my world."

"I should say, madame, that nothing is wise that complicates existence; and I know of nothing that so complicates it as insincerity. Consider a moment the complications that have arisen out of this."

"But surely, André-Louis, your views have not been so perverted that you do not see that a governing class is a necessity in any country?"

"Why, of course. But not necessarily a hereditary one."

"What else?"

He answered her with an epigram. "Man, madame, is the child of his own work. Let there be no inheriting of rights but from such a parent. Thus a nation's best will always predominate, and such a nation will achieve greatly."

"But do you account birth of no importance?"

"Of none, madame—or else my own might trouble me."

From the deep flush that stained her face, he feared that he had offended by what was almost an indelicacy. But the reproof that he was expecting did not come. Instead:

"And does it not?" she asked. "Never, André?"

"Never, madame. I am content."

"You have never . . . never regretted your lack of parents' care?"

He laughed, sweeping aside her sweet charitable concern that was so superfluous. "On the contrary, madame, I tremble to think what they might have made of me, and I am grateful to have had the fashioning of myself."

She looked at him for a moment very sadly, and then, smiling, gently shook her head.

"You do not want self-satisfaction. Yet I could wish that you saw things differently, André. It is a moment of great opportunities for a young man of talent and spirit. I could help you; I could help you perhaps to go very far if you would permit yourself to be helped after my fashion."

"Yes," he thought, "help me to a halter by sending me on treasonable missions to Austria on the Queen's behalf, like M. de Plougastel. That would certainly end in a high position for me."

Aloud he answered more as politeness prompted.

"I am grateful, madame. But you will see that, holding the ideals I have expressed, I could not serve any cause that is opposed to their realisation."

"You are misled by prejudice, André-Louis, by personal grievances. Will you allow them to stand in the way of your advancement?"

"If what I call ideals were really prejudices, would it be honest of me to run counter to them whilst holding them?"

"If I could convince you that you are mistaken! I could help you so much to find a worthy employment for the talents you possess. In the service of the King you would prosper quickly. Will you think of it, André-Louis, and let us talk of this again?"

He answered her with formal chill politeness.

"I fear that it would be idle, madame. Yet your interest in me is very flattering, and I thank you. It is unfortunate for me that I am so headstrong."

"And now who deals in insincerity?" she asked him.

"Ah, but you see, madame, it is an insincerity that does not mislead."

And then M. de Kercadiou came in through the window again, and announced fussily that he must be getting back to Meudon, and that he would take his godson with him and set him down in the Rue du Hasard.

"You must bring him again, Quintin," the Countess said, as they took their leave of her.

"Some day, perhaps," said M. de Kercadiou, vaguely, and swept his godson out.

In the carriage he asked him bluntly of what Madame had talked.

"She was very kind—a sweet woman," said André-Louis, pensively.

"Devil take you, I didn't ask you the opinion that you presume to have formed of her. I asked you what she said to you."

"She strove to point out to me the error of my ways. She spoke of great things that I might do—to which she would very kindly help me—if I were to come to my senses. But as miracles do not happen, I gave her little encouragement to hope."

"I see. I see. Did she say anything else?"

He was so peremptory that André-Louis turned to look at him.

"What else did you expect her to say, monsieur my godfather?"

"Oh, nothing."

"Then she fulfilled your expectations."

"Eh? Oh, a thousand devils! Why can't you express yourself in a sensible manner that a plain man can understand without having to think about it?"

He sulked after that most of the way to the Rue du Hasard, or so it seemed to André-Louis. At least he sat silent, gloomily thoughtful, to judge by his expression.

"You may come and see us soon at Meudon," he told André-Louis at parting. "But please remember—no revolutionary politics in future, if we are to remain friends."

CHAPTER VII

POLITICIANS

ONE morning in August the academy in the Rue du Hasard was invaded by Le Chapelier, accompanied by a man of remarkable appearance, whose herculean stature and disfigured countenance seemed vaguely familiar to André-Louis. He was a man of little, if anything, over thirty, with small bright eyes buried in an enormous face. His cheekbones were prominent, his nose awry, as if it had been broken by a blow, and his mouth was rendered almost shapeless by the scars of another injury (a bull had

horned him in the face when he was but a lad). As if that were not enough to render his appearance terrible, his cheeks were deeply pock-marked. He was dressed untidily in a long scarlet coat that descended almost to his ankles, soiled buckskin breeches, and boots with reversed tops. His shirt, none too clean, was open at the throat, the collar hanging limply over an unknotted cravat, displaying fully the muscular neck that rose like a pillar from his massive shoulders. He swung a cane that was almost a club in his left hand, and there was a cockade in his biscuit-coloured, conical hat. He carried himself with a truculent, masterful air, that great head of his thrown back as if he were eternally at defiance.

Le Chapelier, whose manner was very grave, named him to André-Louis.

"This is M. Danton, a brother-lawyer. President of the Cordeliers, of whom you will have heard."

Of course André-Louis had heard of him. Who had not, by then? Moreover, he remembered now where it was that already he had seen him; he was the man who had refused to take off his hat at the Comédie Française on the night of the stormy performance of *Charles IX*.

Looking at him now, with interest, André-Louis wondered how it came that all, or nearly all, the leading innovators were pock-marked. Mirabeau, the journalist Desmoulins, the philanthropist Marat, Robespierre, the little lawyer from Arras, this formidable fellow, Danton and several others he could call to mind all bore upon them the scars of smallpox. Almost he began to wonder was there any connection between the two. Did an attack of smallpox produce certain moral results which found expression in this way?

He dismissed the idle speculation, or rather it was shattered by the startling thunder of Danton's voice.

"This — Chapelier has told me of you. He says that you are a patriotic——"

More than by the tone was André-Louis startled by the obscenities with which the colossus did not hesitate to interlard his first speech to a total stranger. He laughed outright. There was nothing else to do.

"If he has told you that, he has told you more than the truth! I am a patriot. The rest my modesty compels me to disavow."

"You're a joker, too, it seems," roared the other, but he laughed nevertheless, and the volume of it shook the windows.

"There's no offence in me. I am like that."

"What a pity," said André-Louis.

It disconcerted the king of the markets. "Eh? What's this, Chapelier? Does he give himself airs, your friend here?"

The spruce Bréton, a very petit-maître in appearance by contrast with his companion, but nevertheless of a downright manner quite equal to Danton's in brutality, though dispensing with the emphasis of foulness, shrugged as he answered him.

"It is merely that he doesn't like your manners, which is not at all surprising. They are execrable."

"Ah, bah! You are all like that, you — Brétons. Let's come to business. You'll have heard what took place in the Assembly yesterday? You haven't? My God! where do you live? Have you heard that this scoundrel who calls himself King of France gave passage across French soil the other day to Austrian troops going to crush those who fight for liberty in Belgium? Have you heard that, by any chance?"

"Yes," said André-Louis, coldly, masking his irritation before the other's hectoring manner. "I have heard that."

"Oh! And what do you think of it?" Arms akimbo, the colossus towered above him.

André-Louis turned to Le Chapelier.

"I don't think I understand. Have you brought this gentleman here to examine my conscience?"

"Name of a name! He's prickly as a porcupine!" Danton protested.

"No, no." Chapelier was conciliatory, seeking to provide an antidote to the irritant administered by his companion.

"We require your help, André. Danton here thinks that you are the very man for us. Listen now . . ."

"That's it. You tell him," Danton agreed. "You both talk the same mincing — sort of French. He'll probably understand you."

Le Chapelier went on without heeding the interruption.

"This violation by the King of the obvious rights of a country engaged in framing a constitution that shall make it free has shattered every philanthropic illusion we still cherished. There are those who go so far as to proclaim the King the avowed enemy of France. But that, of course, is excessive."

"Who says so?" blazed Danton, and swore horribly by way of conveying his total disagreement.

Le Chapelier waved him into silence, and proceeded.

"Anyhow, the matter has been more than enough, added to all the rest, to set us by the ears again in the Assembly. It is open war between the Third Estate and the Privileged."

"Was it ever anything else?"

"Perhaps not; but it has assumed a new character. You'll

have heard of the duel between Lameth and the Duc de Castries?"

"A trifling affair."

"In its results. But it might have been far other. Mirabeau is challenged and insulted now at every sitting. But he goes his way, cold-bloodedly wise. Others are not so circumspect; they meet insult with insult, blow with blow, and blood is being shed in private duels. The thing is reduced by these swordsmen of the nobility to a system."

André-Louis nodded. He was thinking of Philippe de Vilmorin. "Yes," he said, "it is an old trick of theirs. It is so simple and direct—like themselves. I wonder only that they didn't hit upon this system sooner. In the early days of the States General at Versailles, it might have had a better effect. Now, it comes a little late."

"But they mean to make up for lost time—sacred name!" cried Danton. "Challenges are flying right and left between these bully-swordsmen, these spadassinicides, and poor devils of the robe who have never learnt to fence with anything but a quill. It's just — murder. Yet if I were to go amongst messieurs les nobles and crunch an addled head or two with this stick of mine, snap a few aristocratic necks between these fingers which the good God has given me for the purpose, the law would send me to atone upon the gallows. This in a land that is striving after liberty. Why, Dieu me damne! I am not even allowed to keep my hat on in the theatre. But they—these —s!"

"He is right," said Le Chapelier. "The thing has become unendurable, insufferable. Two days ago M. d'Ambly threatened Mirabeau with his cane before the whole Assembly. Yesterday M. de Faussign leapt up and harangued his order by inviting murder. 'Why don't we fall on these scoundrels, sword in hand?' he asked. Those were his very words: 'Why don't we fall on these scoundrels, sword in hand?'"

"It is so much simpler than law-making," said André-Louis.

"Lagron, the deputy from Ancenis in the Loire, said something that we did not hear in answer. As he was leaving the Manège one of these bullies grossly insulted him. Lagron no more than used his elbow to push past when the fellow cried out that he had been struck, and issued his challenge. They fought this morning early in the Champs Elysées, and Lagron was killed, run through the stomach deliberately by a man who fought like a fencing-master and poor Lagron did not even own a sword. He had to borrow one to go to the assignation."

André-Louis—his mind ever on Vilmorin, whose case was here

repeated, even to the details—was swept by a gust of passion. He clenched his hands and his jaw set. Danton's little eyes observed him keenly

"Well? And what do you think of that? *Noblesse oblige*! The thing is, we must oblige them too, these —s. We must pay them back in the same coin; meet them with the same weapons. Abolish them; tumble these assassinateurs into the abyss of nothingness by the same means."

"But how?"

"How? Name of God! Haven't I said it?"

"That is where we require your help," Le Chapelier put in. "There must be men of patriotic feeling among the more advanced of your pupils. M. Danton's idea is that a little band of these—say a half-dozen, with yourself at their head, might read these bullies a sharp lesson."

André-Louis frowned.

"And how, precisely, had M. Danton thought that this might be done?"

M. Danton spoke for himself, vehement.

"Why thus: We post you in the Manège, at the hour when the Assembly is rising. We point out the six leading phlebotomists, and let you loose to insult them before they have time to insult any of the representatives. Then to-morrow morning, six — phlebotomists themselves phlebotomised *secundum artem*. That will give the others something to think about. It will give them a great deal to think about, by God! If necessary, the dose may be repeated to ensure a cure. If you kill the —s so much the better."

He paused, his sallow face flushed with the enthusiasm of his idea. André-Louis stared at him inscrutably.

"Well, what do you say to that?"

"That it is most ingenious." And André-Louis turned aside to look out of the window.

"And is that all you think of it?"

"I will not tell you what else I think of it because you probably would not understand. For you, M. Danton, there is at least this excuse, that you did not know me. But you, Isaac—to bring this gentleman here with such a proposal!"

Le Chapelier was overwhelmed in confusion. "I confess I hesitated," he apologised. "But M. Danton would not take my word for it that the proposal might not be to your taste."

"I would not," Danton broke in, bellowing. He swung upon Le Chapelier, brandishing his great arms. "You told me monsieur was a patriot. Patriotism knows no scruples. You call this mincing dancing-master a patriot?"

"Would you, monsieur, out of patriotism consent to become an assassin!"

"Of course I would. Haven't I told you so? Haven't I told you that I would gladly go among them with my club, and crack them like so many — fleas?"

"Why not, then?"

"Why not? Because I should get myself hanged. Haven't I said so?"

"But what of that, being a patriot? Why not, like another Curtius, jump into the gulf, since you believe that your country would benefit by your death?"

M. Danton showed signs of exasperation.

"Because my country will benefit more by my life."

"Permit me, monsieur, to suffer from a similar vanity."

"You? But where would be the danger to you? You would do your work under the cloak of duelling—as they do."

"Have you reflected, monsieur, that the law will hardly regard a fencing-master who kills his opponent as an ordinary combatant, particularly if it can be shown that the fencing-master himself provoked the attack?"

"So! Name of a name!" M. Danton blew out his cheeks and delivered himself with withering scorn. "It comes to this, then: you are afraid!"

"You may think so if you choose; that I am afraid to do stily and treacherously that which a thrasonical patriot like yourself is afraid of doing frankly and openly. I have other reasons. But that one should suffice you."

Danton gasped. Then he swore more amazingly and variedly than ever.

"By — you are right!" he admitted, to André-Louis's amazement. "You are right, and I am wrong. I am as bad a patriot as you are, and I am a coward as well." And he invoked the whole Panthéon to witness his self-denunciation. "Only, you see, I count for something! and if they take me and hang me, why there it is! Monsieur, we must find some other way. Forgive the intrusion. Adieu!" He held out his enormous hand.

Le Chapelier stood hesitating, crestfallen.

"You understand, André. I am sorry that——"

"Say no more, please. Come and see me soon again. I would press you to remain, but it is striking nine, and the first of my pupils is about to arrive."

"Nor would I permit it," said Danton. "Between us we must resolve the riddle of how to extinguish M. de La Tour d'Azyr and his friends."

"Who?"

Sharp as a pistol-shot came that question, as Danton was turning away. The tone of it brought him up short. He turned again, Le Chapelier with him.

"I said M. de La Tour d'Azyr."

"What has he to do with the proposal you were making me?"

"He? Why, he is the phlebotomist-in-chief."

And Le Chapelier added: "It is he who killed Lagron."

"Not a friend of yours, is he?" wondered Danton.

"And it is La Tour d'Azyr you desire me to kill?" asked André-Louis, very slowly, after the manner of one whose thoughts are meanwhile pondering the subject.

"That's it," said Danton. "And not a job for a prentice hand, I can assure you."

"Ah, but this alters things," said André-Louis, thinking aloud. "It offers a great temptation."

"Why, then . . . ?" The colossus took a step towards him again.

"Wait!" He put up his hand. Then with chin sunk on his breast, he paced away to the window, musing.

Le Chapelier and Danton exchanged glances, then watched him, waiting, what time he considered.

At first he almost wondered why he should not of his own accord have decided upon some such course as this to settle that long-standing account of M. de La Tour d'Azyr. What was the use of this great skill in fence that he had come to acquire, unless he could turn it to account to avenge Vilmorin, and to make Aline safe from the lure of her own ambition? It would be an easy thing to seek out La Tour d'Azyr, put a mortal affront upon him, and thus bring him to the point. To-day this would be murder; murder as treacherous as that which La Tour d'Azyr had done upon Philippe de Vilmorin; for to-day the old positions were reversed, and it was André-Louis who might go to such an assignation without a doubt of the issue. It was a moral obstacle of which he made short work. But there remained the legal obstacle he had expounded to Danton. There was still a law in France; the same law which he had found it impossible to move against La Tour d'Azyr, but which would move briskly enough against himself in like case. And then, suddenly, as if by inspiration, he saw the way—a way which, if adopted, would probably bring La Tour d'Azyr to a poetic justice, bring him insolent, confident, to thrust himself upon André-Louis's sword, with all the odium of provocation on his own side.

He turned to them again, and they saw that he was very pale, that his great dark eyes glowed oddly.

"There will probably be some difficulty in finding a suppleant for this poor Lagron," he said. "Our fellow-countrymen will be none too eager to offer themselves to the swords of Privilege."

"True enough," said Le Chapelier, gloomily, and then as if suddenly leaping to the thing in André-Louis's mind: "André!" he cried. "Would you . . . ?"

"It is what I was considering. It would give me a legitimate place in the Assembly. If your Tour d'Azyr's choose to seek me out then—why their blood be upon their own heads. I shall certainly do nothing to discourage them." He smiled curiously. "I am just a rascal who tries to be honest—Scaramouche always in fact; a creature of sophistries. Do you think that Ancenis would have me for its representative?"

"Will it have Omnes Omnibus for its representative?" Le Chapelier was laughing, his countenance eager. "Ancenis will be beside itself with pride. It is not Rennes or Nantes, as it might have been had you wished it. But it gives you a voice for Brittany."

"I should have to go to Ancenis . . . ?"

"No need at all. A letter from me to the Municipality, and the Municipality will confirm you at once. No need to move from here. In a fortnight at most the thing can be accomplished. It is settled then?"

André-Louis considered yet a moment. There was his academy. But he could make arrangements with Le Duc and Galoche to carry it on for him whilst himself directing and advising. Le Duc, after all, was become a thoroughly efficient master, and he was a trustworthy fellow. At need a third assistant could be engaged.

"Be it so," he said at last.

Le Chapelier clasped hands with him and became congratulatorily voluble, until interrupted by the red-coated giant at the door.

"What exactly does it mean to our business, anyway?" he asked. "Does it mean that when you are a representative you will not scruple to skewer Monsieur le Marquis?"

"If Monsieur le Marquis should offer himself to be skewered, as he no doubt will."

"I perceive the distinction," said M. Danton, and sneered. "You've an ingenious mind." He turned to Le Chapelier. "What did you say he was to begin with—a lawyer, wasn't it?"

"Yes, I was a lawyer, and afterwards a mountebank."

"And this is the result!"

"As you say. And do you know that we are, after all, not so dissimilar, you and I?"

"What?"

"Once, like you, I went about inciting other people to go and kill the man I wanted dead. You'll say I was a coward, of course."

Le Chapelier prepared to slip between them as the clouds gathered on the giant's brow. Then these were dispelled again, and the great laugh vibrated through the long room.

"You've touched me for the second time, and in the same place. Oh, you can fence, my lad. We should be friends, Rue des Cordeliers is my address. Any — scoundrel will tell you where Danton lodges. Desmoulins lives underneath. Come and visit us one evening. There's always a bottle for a friend."

CHAPTER VIII

THE SPADASSINICIDES

AFTER an absence of rather more than a week, M. le Marquis de La Tour d'Azyr was back in his place on the Côte Droit of the National Assembly. Probably speaking, we should already at this date allude to him as the *ci-devant* Marquis de La Tour d'Azyr, for the time was September of 1790, two months after the passing — on the motion of that downright Bréton leveller, Le Chapelier — of the decree that nobility should no more be hereditary than infamy, that just as the brand of the gallows must not defile the possibly worthy descendants of one who had been convicted of evil, neither should the blazon advertising achievement glorify the possibly unworthy descendants of one who had proved himself good. And so the decree had been passed abolishing hereditary nobility and consigning family escutcheons to the rubbish-heap of things no longer to be tolerated by an enlightened generation of philosophers. M. le Comte de Lafayette, who had supported the motion, left the Assembly as plain M. Motier, the great tribune Count Mirabeau became plain M. Riquetti, and M. le Marquis de La Tour d'Azyr just imple M. Lesarques. The thing was done in one of those exaltations produced by the approach of the great National Festival of the Champ de Mars, and no doubt it was thoroughly repented on the morrow by those who had lent themselves to it. Thus, although law by now, it was a law that no one troubled just yet to enforce.

That, however, is by the way. The time, as I have said, was September, the day dull and showery, and some of the damp and gloom of it seemed to have penetrated the long Hall of the Manège, where on their eight rows of green benches, elliptically arranged in ascending tiers about the space known as La Piste, sat some eight or nine hundred of the representatives of the three orders that composed the nation.

The matter under debate by the constitution-builders was whether the deliberating body to succeed the Constituent Assembly should work in conjunction with the King, whether it should be periodic or permanent, whether it should govern by two chambers or by one.

The Abbé Maury, son of a cobbler, and therefore in these days of antithesis orator-in-chief of the party of the Right—the Blacks, as those who fought Privilege's losing battles were known—was in the tribune. He appeared to be urging the adoption of a two-chambers system framed on the English model. He was, if anything, more long-winded and prosy even than his habit; his arguments assumed more and more the form of a sermon; the tribune of the National Assembly became more and more like a pulpit; but the members, conversely less and less like a congregation. They grew restive under that steady flow of pompous verbiage, and it was in vain that the four ushers in black satin breeches and carefully powdered heads, chain of office on their breasts, gilded swords at their sides, circulated in the Piste, clapping their hands and hissing:

“Silence! En place!”

Equally vain was the intermittent ringing of the bell by the president at his green-covered table facing the tribune. The Abbé Maury had talked too long, and for some time had failed to interest the members. Realising it at last, he ceased, whereupon the hum of conversation became general. And then it fell abruptly. There was a silence of expectancy, and a turning of heads, a craning of necks. Even the group of secretaries at the round table below the president's dais roused themselves from their usual apathy to consider this young man who was mounting the tribune of the Assembly for the first time.

“M. André-Louis Moreau, deputy-suppléant, vice Emmanuel Lagron, deceased, for Ancenis in the Department of the Loire.”

M. de La Tour d'Azyr shook himself out of the gloomy abstraction in which he had sat. The successor of the deputy he had slain must, in any event, be an object of grim interest to him. You conceive how that interest was heightened when he heard him named, when, looking across, he recognised indeed

in this André-Louis Moreau the young scoundrel who was continually crossing his path, continually exerting against him a deep-moving, sinister influence to make him regret that he should have spared his life that day at Gavrilac two years ago. That he should thus have stepped into the shoes of Lagron seemed to M. de La Tour d'Azyr too apt for mere coincidence, a direct challenge in itself.

He looked at the young man in wonder rather than in anger, and looking at him he was filled by a vague, almost premonitory uneasiness.

And at the very outset, the presence, which in itself he conceived to be a challenge, was to demonstrate itself for this in no equivocal terms.

"I come before you," André-Louis began, "as a deputy-suppléant to fill the place of one who was murdered some three weeks ago."

It was an arresting opening that instantly provoked an indignant outcry from the Blacks. André-Louis paused and looked at them, smiling a little, a singularly self-confident young man.

"The gentlemen of the Right, M. le President, do not appear to take my words. But that is not surprising. The gentlemen of the Right notoriously do not like the truth."

This time there was uproar. The members of the Left roared with laughter, those of the Right thundered menacingly. The ushers circulated at a pace beyond their usual, agitated themselves, clapped their hands, and called in vain for silence.

The president rang his bell.

Above the general din came the voice of La Tour d'Azyr, who had half-risen from his seat: "Mountebank! This is not the theatre!"

"No, monsieur, it is becoming a hunting-ground or bully swordsmen," was the answer, and the uproar grew.

The deputy-suppléant looked round and waited. Near at hand he met the encouraging grin of Le Chapelier, and the quiet approving smile of Kersain, another Bréton deputy of his acquaintance. A little farther off he saw the great head of Mirabeau thrown back, the great eyes regarding him from under a frown in a sort of wonder, and yonder, among all that moving sea of faces, the sallow countenance of the Arras lawyer, Robespierre—or *de* Robespierre, as the little snob now called himself, having assumed the aristocratic particle as the prerogative of a man of his distinction in the councils of his country. With his tip-tilted nose in the air, his carefully curled head on one side, the deputy for Arras

was observing André-Louis attentively. The horn-rimmed spectacles he used for reading were thrust up on to his pale forehead, and it was through a levelled spy-glass that he considered the speaker, his thin-lipped mouth stretched a little in that tiger-cat smile that was afterwards to become so famous and so feared.

Gradually the uproar wore itself out, and diminished so that at last the president could make himself heard. Leaning forward, he gravely addressed the young man in the tribune.

"Monsieur, if you wish to be heard, let me beg of you not to be provocative in your language." And then to the others: "Messieurs, if we are to proceed, I beg that you will restrain your feelings until the deputy-suppléant has concluded his discourse."

"I shall endeavour to obey, M. le President, leaving provocation to the gentlemen of the Right. If the few words I have used so far have been provocative, I regret it. But it was necessary that I should refer to the distinguished deputy whose place I come so unworthily to fill, and it was unavoidable that I should refer to the event which has procured us this sad necessity. The deputy Lagron was a man of singular nobility of mind, a selfless, dutiful, zealous man, inflamed by the high purpose of doing his duty by his electors and by this Assembly. He possessed what his opponents would call a dangerous gift of eloquence."

La Tour d'Azyr writhed at the well-known phrase—his own phrase, the phrase that he had used to explain his action in the matter of Philippe de Vilморin, the phrase that from time to time had been cast in his teeth with such vindictive menace.

And then the crisp voice of the witty Cazalés, that very rapier of the Privileged Party, cut sharply into the speaker's momentary pause.

"M. le President," he asked, with great solemnity, "has the deputy-suppléant mounted the tribune for the purpose of taking part in the debate on the constitution of the legislative assemblies, or for the purpose of pronouncing a funeral oration upon the departed deputy Lagron?"

This time it was the Blacks who gave way to mirth, until checked by the deputy-suppléant.

"That laughter is obscene!" In this truly Gallic fashion he flung his glove into the face of Privilege, determined, you see, upon no half-measures; and the rippling laughter perished on the instant, quenched in speechless fury.

Solemnly he proceeded.

"You all know how Lagron died. To refer to his death at all requires courage, to laugh in referring to it requires something that I will not attempt to qualify. If I have alluded to his

decease, it is because my own appearance among you seemed to render some such allusion necessary. It is mine to take up the burden which he set down. I do not pretend that I have the strength, the courage, or the wisdom of Lagron ; but with every ounce of such strength and courage and wisdom as I possess that burden will I bear. And I trust, for the sake of those who might attempt it, that the means taken to impose silence upon that eloquent voice will not be taken to impose silence upon mine."

There was a faint murmur of applause from the Left, a splutter of contemptuous laughter from the Right.

"Rhodomont !" a voice called to him.

He looked in the direction of that voice, proceeding from the group of spadassins amid the Blacks across the Piste, and he smiled. Inaudibly his lips answered :

"No, my friend—Scaramouche ; Scaramouche, the subtle, dangerous fellow who goes tortuously to his ends." Aloud he resumed : "M. le President, there are those who will not understand that the purpose for which we are assembled here is the making of laws by which France may be equitably governed, by which France may be lifted out of the morass of bankruptcy into which she is in danger of sinking. For there are some who want, it seems, not laws, but blood ; I solemnly warn them that this blood will end by choking them, if they do not learn in time to discard force and allow reason to prevail."

Again in that phrase there was something that stirred a memory in La Tour d'Azyr. He turned in the fresh uproar to speak to his cousin Chabrilanne who sat beside him.

"A daring rogue, this bastard of Gavrillac's," said he.

Chabrilanne looked at him with gleaming eyes, his face white with anger.

"Let him talk himself out. I don't think he will be heard again after to-day. Leave this to me."

Hardly could La Tour have told you why, but he sank back in his seat with a sense of relief. He had been telling himself that here was matter demanding action, a challenge that he must take up. But despite his rage he felt a singular unwillingness. This fellow had a trick of reminding him, he supposed, too unpleasantly of that young abbé done to death in the garden behind the 'Bréton Armé' at Gavrillac. Not that the death of Philippe de Vilmorin lay heavily upon M. de La Tour d'Azyr's conscience. He had accounted himself fully justified of his action. It was that the whole thing as his memory revived it for him made an unpleasant picture ; that distraught boy kneeling over the bleeding body of the friend he had loved, and almost begging

to be slain with him, dubbing the Marquis murderer and coward to incite him.

Meanwhile, leaving now the subject of the death of Lagron, the deputy-suppléant had at last brought himself into order, and was speaking upon the question under debate. He contributed nothing of value to it; he urged nothing definite. His speech on the subject was very brief—that being the pretext and not the purpose for which he had ascended the tribune.

When later he was leaving the hall at the end of the sitting, with Le Chapelier at his side, he found himself densely surrounded by deputies as by a body-guard. Most of them were Brétons, who aimed at screening him from the provocations which his own provocative words in the Assembly could not fail to bring down upon his head. For a moment the massive form of Mirabeau brought up alongside of him.

"Felicitations, M. Moreau," said the great man. "You acquitted yourself very well. They will want your blood, no doubt. But be discreet, monsieur, if I may presume to advise you, and do not allow yourself to be misled by any false sense of quixotry. Ignore their challenges. I do so myself. I place each challenger upon my list. There are some fifty there already, and there they will remain. Refuse them what they are pleased to call satisfaction, and all will be well."

André-Louis smiled and sighed. "It requires courage," said the hypocrite.

"Of course it does. But you would appear to have plenty."

"Hardly enough, perhaps. But I shall do my best."

They had come through the vestibule, and although this was lined with eager Blacks waiting for the young man who had insulted them so flagrantly from the rostrum, André-Louis's body-guard had prevented any of them reaching him.

Emerging now into the open, under the great awning at the head of the Carrière, erected to enable carriages to reach the door under cover, those in front of him dispersed a little, and there was a moment as he reached the limit of the awning when his front was entirely uncovered. Outside the rain was falling heavily, churning the ground into thick mud, and for a moment André-Louis, with Le Chapelier ever at his side, stood hesitating to step out into the deluge.

The watchful Chabrilanne had seen his chance, and by a détour that took him momentarily out into the rain, he came face to face with the too-daring young Bréton. Rudely, violently, he thrust André-Louis back, as if to make room for himself under the shelter.

Not for a second was André-Louis under any delusion as to

the man's deliberate purpose, nor were those who stood near him, who made a belated and ineffectual attempt to close about him. He was grievously disappointed. It was not Chabrilanne he had been expecting. His disappointment was reflected on his countenance, to be mistaken for something very different by the arrogant Chevalier.

But if Chabrilanne was the man appointed to deal with him he would make the best of it.

"I think you are pushing against me, monsieur," he said, very civilly, and with elbow and shoulder he thrust M. de Chabrilanne back into the rain.

"I desire to take shelter, monsieur," the Chevalier hectorcd.

"You may do so without standing on my feet. I have a prejudice against anyone standing on my feet. My feet are very tender. Perhaps you did not know it, monsieur. Please say no more."

"Why, I wasn't speaking, you lout!" exclaimed the Chevalier, slightly discomposed.

"Were you not? I thought perhaps you were about to apologise."

"Apologise?" Chabrilanne laughed. "To you? Do you know that you are amusing?" He stepped under the awning for the second time, and again in view of all thrust André-Louis rudely back.

"Ah!" cried André-Louis, with a grimace. "You hurt me, monsieur. I have told you not to push against me." He raised his voice that all might hear him, and once more impelled M. de Chabrilanne back into the rain.

Now, for all his slenderness, his assiduous daily sword-practice had given André-Louis an arm of iron. Also he threw his weight into the thrust. His assailant reeled backward a few steps, and then his heel struck a balk of timber left on the ground by some workmen that morning, and he sat down suddenly in the mud.

A roar of laughter rose from all who witnessed the fine gentleman's downfall. He rose, mud-bespattered, in a fury, and in that fury sprang at André-Louis.

André-Louis had made him ridiculous, which was altogether unforgivable.

"You shall meet me for this," he spluttered. "I shall kill you for it."

His inflamed face was within a foot of André-Louis. André-Louis laughed. In the silence everybody heard the laugh and the words that followed.

"Oh, is that what you wanted? But why didn't you say so

before? You would have spared me the trouble of knocking you down. I thought gentlemen of your profession invariably conducted these affairs with decency, decorum, and a certain grace. Had you done so, you might have saved your breeches."

"How soon shall we settle this?" snapped Chabrilanne, livid with very real fury.

"Whenever you please, monsieur. It is for you to say when it will suit your convenience to kill me. I think that was the intention you announced, was it not?" André-Louis was suavity itself.

"To-morrow morning, in the Bois. Perhaps you will bring a friend."

"Certainly, monsieur. To-morrow morning then. I hope we shall have fine weather. I detest the rain."

Chabrilanne looked at him almost with amazement. André-Louis smiled pleasantly.

"Don't let me detain you now, monsieur. We quite understand each other. I shall be in the Bois at nine o'clock to-morrow morning."

"That is too late for me, monsieur."

"Any other hour would be too early for me. I do not like to have my habits disturbed. Nine o'clock, or not at all—as you please."

"But I must be at the Assembly at nine, for the morning session."

"I am afraid, monsieur, you will have to kill me first, and I have a prejudice against being killed before nine o'clock."

Now this was too complete a subversion of the usual procedure for M. de Chabrilanne's stomach. Here was a rustic deputy assuming with him precisely the tone of sinister mockery which his class usually dealt out to their victims of the Third Estate. And to heighten the irritation, André-Louis—the actor, Scaramouche, always—produced his snuff-box, and proffered it with a steady hand to Le Chapelier before helping himself.

Chabrilanne, it seemed, after all that he had suffered, was not even to be allowed to make a good exit.

"Very well, monsieur," he said. "Nine o'clock then; and we'll see if you'll talk as pertly afterwards."

On that he flung a ray, before the jeers of the provincial deputies. Nor did it soothe his rage to be laughed at by urchins all the way down the Rue Dauphine because of the mud and filth that dripped from his satin breeches and the tails of his elegant, striped coat.

But though the members of the Third had jeered on the surface, they trembled underneath with fear and indignation.

It was too much. Lagron killed by one of these bullies, and now his successor challenged, and about to be killed by another of them on the very first day of his appearance to take the dead man's place. Several came now to implore André-Louis not to go to the Bois, to ignore the challenge and the whole affair, which was but a deliberate attempt to put him out of the way. He listened seriously, shook his head gloomily, and promised at last to think it over.

He was in his seat again for the afternoon session as if nothing disturbed him

But in the morning, when the Assembly met, his place was vacant, and so was M. de Chabrillanne's. Gloom and resentment sat upon the members of the Third, and brought a more than usually acrid note into their debates. They disapproved of the rashness of the new recruit to their body. Some openly condemned his lack of circumspection. Very few—and those only the little group in Le Chapelier's confidence—ever expected to see him again.

It was therefore as much in amazement as in relief that at a few minutes after ten they saw him enter, calm, composed and bland, and thread his way to his seat. The speaker occupying the rostrum at that moment—a member of the Privileged—stopped short to stare in incredulous dismay. Here was something that he could not understand at all. Then somewhere, to satisfy the amazement on both sides of the Assembly, a voice explained the phenomenon contemptuously.

"They haven't met. He has shirked it at the last moment."

It must be so, thought all; the mystification ceased, and men were settling back into their seats. But now, having reached his place, having heard the voice that explained the matter to the universal satisfaction, André-Louis paused before taking his seat. He felt it incumbent upon him to reveal the true fact.

"M. le President, my excuses for my late arrival." There was no necessity for this. It was a mere piece of theatricality, such as it was not in Scaramouche's nature to forgo. "I have been detained by an engagement of a pressing nature. I bring you also the excuses of M. de Chabrillanne. He, unfortunately, will be permanently absent from this Assembly in future."

The silence was complete. André-Louis sat down.

CHAPTER IX

THE PALADIN OF THE THIRD

M. LE CHEVALIER DE CHABRILLANNE had been closely connected, you will remember, with the iniquitous affair in which Philippe de Vilmorin had lost his life. We know enough to justify a surmise that he had not merely been La Tour d'Azyr's second in the encounter, but actually an instigator of the business. André-Louis may therefore have felt a justifiable satisfaction in offering up the Chevalier's life to the Manes of his murdered friend. He may have viewed it as an act of common justice not to be procured by any other means. Also it is to be remembered that Chabrilanne had gone confidently to the meeting, conceiving that he, a practised *ferailleur*, had to deal with a bourgeois utterly unskilled in swordsmanship. Morally, then, he was little better than a murderer, and that he should have tumbled into the pit he conceived that he dug for André-Louis was a poetic retribution. Yet, notwithstanding all this, I should find the cynical note on which André-Louis announced the issue to the Assembly utterly detestable did I believe it sincere. It would justify Aline of the expressed opinion which she held in common with so many others who had come into close contact with him, that André-Louis was quite heartless.

You have seen something of the same heartlessness in his conduct when he discovered the faithlessness of La Binet, although that is belied by the measures he took to avenge himself. His subsequent contempt of the woman I account to be born of the affection in which for a time he held her. That this affection was as deep as he first imagined, I do not believe ; but that it was as shallow as he would almost be at pains to make it appear by the completeness with which he affects to have put her from his mind when he discovered her worthlessness, I do not believe ; nor, as I have said, do his actions encourage that belief. Then, again, his callous cynicism in hoping that he had killed Binet is also an affectation. Knowing that such things as Binet are better out of the world, he can have suffered no compunction ; he had, you must remember, that rarely level vision which sees things in their just proportions, and never either magnifies or reduces them by sentimental considerations. At the same time, that he should contemplate the taking of life with such complete and cynical equanimity whatever the justification, is quite incredible.

Similarly now, it is not to be believed that in coming straight from the Bois de Boulogne, straight from the killing of a man, he should be sincerely expressing his nature in alluding to the fact in terms of such outrageous flippancy. Not quite to such an extent was he the incarnation of Scaramouche. But sufficiently was he so ever to mask his true feelings by an arresting gesture, his true thoughts by an effective phrase. He was the actor always : a man ever calculating the effect he would produce, ever avoiding self-revelation, ever concerned to overlay his real character by an assumed and quite fictitious one. There was in this something of impishness, and something of other things.

No one laughed now at his flippancy. He did not intend that anybody should. He intended to be terrible ; and he knew that the more flippant and casual his tone, the more terrible would be its effect. He produced exactly the effect he desired.

What followed in a place where feelings and practices had become what they had become is not difficult to surmise. When the session rose, there were a dozen spadassins awaiting him in the vestibule, and this time the men of his own party were less concerned to guard him. He seemed so entirely capable of guarding himself ; he appeared, for all his circumspection, to have completely carried the war into the enemy's camp, so completely to have adopted their own methods, that his fellows scarcely felt the need to protect him as yesterday.

As he emerged, he scanned that hostile file, whose air and garments marked them so clearly for what they were. He paused, seeking the man he expected, the man he was most anxious to oblige. But M. de La Tour d'Azyr was absent from those eager ranks. This seemed to him odd. La Tour d'Azyr was Chabrilanne's cousin and closest friend. Surely he should have been among the first to-day. The fact was that La Tour d'Azyr was too deeply overcome by amazement and grief at the utterly unexpected event. Also his vindictiveness was held curiously in leash. Perhaps he, too, remembered the part played by Chabrilanne in the affair at Gavrillac, and saw in this obscure André-Louis Moreau, who had so persistently persecuted him ever since, an ordained avenger. The repugnance he felt to come to the point with him, particularly after this culminating provocation, was puzzling even to himself. But it existed, and it curbed him now.

To André-Louis, since La Tour was not one of that waiting pack, it mattered little on that Tuesday morning who should be the next. The next, as it happened, was the young Vicomte

de La Motte-Royau, one of the deadliest blades in the group.

On the Wednesday morning, coming again an hour or so late to the Assembly, André-Louis announced—in much the same terms as he had announced the death of Chabrilanne—that M. de La Motte-Royau would probably not disturb the harmony of the Assembly for some weeks to come, assuming that he were so fortunate as to recover ultimately from the effects of an unpleasant accident with which he had quite unexpectedly had the misfortune to meet that morning.

On Thursday he made an identical announcement with regard to the Vidame de Blavon. On Friday he told them that he had been delayed by M. des Troiscantins, and then turning to the members of the Côté Droit, and lengthening his face to a sympathetic gravity :

“I am glad to inform you, messieurs, that M. des Troiscantins is in the hands of a very competent surgeon, who hopes with care to restore him to your councils in a few weeks’ time.”

It was paralysing, fantastic, unreal ; and friend and foe in that Assembly sat alike stupefied under those bland daily announcements. Four of the most redoubtable spadassinicides put away for a time, one of them dead—and all this performed with such an air of indifference and announced in such casual terms by a wretched little provincial lawyer !

He began to assume in their eyes a romantic aspect. Even that group of philosophers of the Côté Gauche, who refused to worship any force but the force of reason, began to look upon him with a respect and consideration which no oratorical triumphs could ever have procured him.

And from the Assembly the fame of him oozed out gradually over Paris. Desmoulins wrote a panegyric upon him in his paper, *Les Révolutions*, wherein he dubbed him the Paladin of the Third Estate, a name that caught the fancy of the people and clung to him for some time. Disdainfully was he mentioned in the *Actes des Apôtres*, the mocking organ of the Privileged party, so light-heartedly and provocatively edited by a group of gentlemen afflicted by a singular mental myopy.

The Friday of that very busy week in the life of this young man, who even thereafter is to persist in reminding us that he is not in any sense a man of action, found the vestibule of the Manège empty of swordsmen when he made his leisurely and expectant egress between Le Chapelier and Kersain.

So surprised was he that he checked in his stride

“Have they had enough ?” he wondered, addressing the question to Le Chapelier.

"They have had enough of you, I should think," was the answer. "They will prefer to turn their attention to someone less able to take care of himself."

Now this was disappointing. André-Louis had lent himself to this business with a very definite object in view. The slaying of Chabrilanne had, as far as it went, been satisfactory. He had regarded that as a sort of acceptable hors d'œuvre. But the three who had followed were no affair of his at all. He had met them with a certain amount of repugnance, and dealt with each as lightly as consideration of his own safety permitted. Was the baiting of him now to cease whilst the man at whom he aimed had not presented himself? In that case it would be necessary to force the pace!

Out there under the awning a group of gentlemen stood in earnest talk. Scanning the group, André-Louis perceived M. de La Tour d'Azyr amongst them. He tightened his lips. He must afford no provocation. It must be for them to fasten their quarrels upon him. Already the *Actes des Apôtres* that morning had torn the mask from his face, and proclaimed him the fencing-master of the Rue du Hasard, successor to Bertrand des Amis. Hazardous as it had been hitherto for a man of his condition to engage in single combat, it was rendered doubly so by this exposure, offered to the public as an aristocratic apologia.

Still, matters could not be left where they were, or he should have had all his pains for nothing. Carefully looking away from that group of gentlemen, he raised his voice so that his words must carry to their ears.

"It begins to look as if my fears of having to spend the remainder of my days in the Bois were idle."

Out of the corner of his eye he caught the stir his words created in that group. Its members had turned to look at him; but for the moment that was all. A little more was necessary. Pacing slowly along between his friends he resumed:

"But is it not remarkable that the assassin of Lagron should make no move against Lagron's successor? Or perhaps it is not remarkable. Perhaps there are good reasons. Perhaps the gentleman is prudent."

He had passed the group by now, and he left that last sentence of his to trail behind him, and after it sent laughter, insolent and provoking.

He had not long to wait. Came a quick step behind him, and a hand falling upon his shoulder span him violently round. He was brought face to face with M. de La Tour d'Azyr, whose handsome countenance was calm and composed but whose eyes reflected something of the sudden blaze of passion stirring in

him. Behind him several members of the group were approaching more slowly. The others—like André-Louis's two companions—remained at gaze.

"You spoke of me, I think," said the Marquis, quietly.

"I spoke of an assassin—yes. But to these my friends." André-Louis's manner was no less quiet—indeed, the quieter of the two, for he was the more experienced actor.

"You spoke loudly enough to be overheard," said the Marquis, answering the insinuation that he had been eaves-dropping.

"Those who wish to overhear frequently contrive to do so."

"I perceive that it is your aim to be offensive."

"Oh, but you are mistaken, M. le Marquis. I have no wish to be offensive. But I resent having hands violently laid upon me, especially when they are hands that I cannot consider clean. In the circumstances I can hardly be expected to be polite."

The elder man's eyelids flickered. Almost he caught himself admiring André-Louis's bearing. Rather he feared that his own must suffer by comparison. Because of this, he enraged altogether, and lost control of himself.

"You spoke of me as the assassin of Lagron. I do not affect to misunderstand you. You expounded your views to me once before, and I remember."

"But what flattery, monsieur!"

"You called me an assassin then, because I used my skill to dispose of a turbulent hot-head, who made the world unsafe for me. But how much better are you, M. the fencing-master, when you oppose yourself to men whose skill is as naturally inferior to your own."

M. de La Tour d'Azyr's friends looked grave, perturbed. It was really incredible to find this great gentleman so far forgetting himself as to descend to argument with a canaille of a lawyer-swordsman. And, what was worse, it was an argument in which he was being made ridiculous.

"I oppose myself to them?" said André-Louis, on a tone of amused protest. "Ah, pardon, M. le Marquis; it is they who choose to oppose themselves to me—and so stupidly. They push me, they slap my face, they tread on my toes, they call me by unpleasant names. What if I am a fencing-master? Must I on that account submit to every manner of ill-treatment from your bad-mannered friends? Perhaps had they found out sooner that I am a fencing-master their manners would have been better. But to blame me for that! What injustice!"

"Comedian!" the Marquis contemptuously apostrophised

him. "Does it alter the case? Are these men who have opposed you men who live by the sword like yourself?"

"On the contrary, M. le Marquis, I have found them men who die by the sword with astonishing ease. I cannot suppose that you desire to add yourself to their number."

"And why, if you please?" La Tour d'Azyr's face had flamed scarlet before that sneer.

"Oh!" André-Louis raised his eyebrows and pursed his lips, a man considering. He delivered himself slowly. "Because, monsieur, you prefer the easy victim—the Lagrons and Vilmorins of this world, mere sheep for your butchering. That is why."

And then the Marquis struck him.

André-Louis stepped back. His eyes gleamed a moment, the next they were smiling up into the face of his tall enemy.

"No better than the others, after all! Well, well! Remark, I beg you, how history repeats itself—with certain differences. Because poor Vilmorin could not bear a vile lie with which you goaded him, he struck you. Because you cannot bear an equally vile truth which I have uttered, you strike me. But always is the vileness yours. And now as then for the striker there is . . ." He broke off. "But why name it? You will remember what there is. Yourself you wrote it that day with the point of your too-ready sword. But there! I will meet you if you desire it, monsieur."

"What else do you suppose that I desire? To talk?"

André-Louis turned to his friends and sighed. "So that I am to go another jaunt to the Bois. Isaac, perhaps you will kindly have a word with one of these friends of M. le Marquis's and arrange for nine o'clock to-morrow, as usual."

"Not to-morrow," said the Marquis, shortly, to Le Chapelier "I have an engagement in the country, which I cannot postpone."

Le Chapelier looked at André-Louis.

"Then for M. le Marquis's convenience, we will say Sunday at the same hour."

"I do not fight on Sunday. I am not a pagan to break the holy day."

"But surely the good God would not have the presumption to damn a gentleman of M. le Marquis's quality on that account? Ah, well, Isaac, please arrange for Monday, if it is not a feast-day, or monsieur has not some other pressing engagement. I leave it in your hands."

He bowed with the air of a man wearied by these details, and, threading his arm through Kersain's, withdrew.

"Ah, Dieu de Dieu ! But what a trick of it you have," said the Bréton deputy, entirely unsophisticated in these matters.

"To be sure I have. I have taken lessons at their hands." He laughed. He was in excellent good-humour. And Kersain was enrolled in the ranks of those who accounted André-Louis a man without heart or conscience.

But in his "Confessions" he tells us—and this is one of the glimpses that reveal the true man under all that make-believe—that on that night he went down on his knees to commune with his dead friend Philippe, and to call his spirit to witness that he was about to take the last step in the fulfilment of the oath sworn upon his body at Gavrillac two years ago.

CHAPTER X

TORN PRIDE

M. DE LA TOUR D'AZYR's engagement in the country on that Sunday was with M. de Kercadiou. To fulfil it he drove out early in the day to Meudon, taking with him, in his pocket, a copy of the last issue of *The Acts of the Apostles*, a journal whose merry sallies at the expense of the innovators greatly diverted the Seigneur de Gavrillac. The venomous scorn it poured upon those worthless rapsallions afforded him a certain solatium against the discomforts of expatriation by which he was afflicted as a result of their detestable energies.

Twice in the last month had M. de La Tour d'Azyr gone to visit the Lord of Gavrillac at Meudon, and the sight of Aline, so sweet and fresh, so bright and of so lively a mind, had caused those embers smouldering under the ashes of the past, embers which until now he had believed utterly extinct, to kindle into flame once more. He desired her as we desire Heaven. I believe that it was the purest passion of his life ; that had it come to him earlier he might have been a vastly different man. The cruellest wound that in all his selfish life he had taken was when she sent him word quite definitely after the affair at the Feydau that she could not again in any circumstances receive him. At one blow—through that disgraceful riot—he had been robbed of a mistress he prized and of a wife who had become a necessity to the very soul of him. The sordid love of La Binet might have consoled him for the compulsory renunciation of his exalted love of Aline just as to his exalted love of Aline he had been ready

to sacrifice his attachment to La Binet. But that ill-timed riot had robbed him at once of both. Faithful to his word to Sautron, he had definitely broken with La Binet, only to find that Aline had definitely broken with him. And by the time that he had sufficiently recovered from his grief to think again of La Binet, the comedienne had vanished beyond discovery.

For all this he blamed, and most bitterly blamed, André-Louis. That low-born provincial lout pursued him like a Nemesis, was become indeed the evil genius of his life. That was it—the evil genius of his life! And it was odds that on Monday . . . He did not like to think of Monday. He was not particularly afraid of death. He was as brave as his kind in that respect, too brave in the ordinary way, and too confident of his skill, to have considered even remotely such a possibility as that of dying in a duel. It was only that it would seem like a proper consummation of all the evil that he had suffered directly or indirectly through this André-Louis Moreau that he should perish ignobly by his hand. Almost he could hear that insolent, pleasant voice making the flippant announcement to the Assembly on Monday morning.

He shook off the mood, angry with himself for entertaining it. It was maudlin. After all, Chabrilanne and La Motte-Royau were quite exceptional swordsmen, but neither of them really approached his own formidable calibre. Reaction began to flow, as he drove out through country lanes flooded with pleasant September sunshine. His spirits rose. A premonition of victory stirred within him. Far from fearing Monday's meeting, as he had so unreasonably been doing, he began to look forward to it. It should afford him the means of setting a definite term to this persecution of which he had been the victim. He would crush this insolent and persistent flea that had been stinging him at every opportunity. Borne upward on that wave of optimism, he took presently a more hopeful view of his case with Aline.

At their first meeting a month ago he had used the utmost frankness with her. He had told her the whole truth of his motives in going that night to the Feydau; he had made her realise that she had acted unjustly towards him. True, he had gone no further.

But that was very far to have gone as a beginning. And in their last meeting, now a fortnight old, she had received him with frank friendliness. True, she had been a little aloof. But that was to be expected until he quite explicitly avowed that he had revived the hope of winning her. He had been a fool not to have returned before to-day.

Thus in that mood of new-born confidence—a confidence risen from the very ashes of despondency—came he on that Sunday morning to Meudon. He was gay and jovial with M. de Kercadiou what time he waited in the salon for Mademoiselle to show herself. He pronounced with confidence on the country's future. There were signs already—he wore the rosiest spectacles that morning—of a change of opinion of a more moderate note. The nation began to perceive whither this lawyer rabble was leading it. He pulled out *The Acts of the Apostles* and read a stinging paragraph. Then, when Mademoiselle at last made her appearance, he resigned the journal into the hands of M. de Kercadiou.

M. de Kercadiou, with his niece's future to consider, went to read the paper in the garden, taking up there a position whence he could keep the couple within sight—as his obligations seemed to demand of him—whilst being discreetly out of earshot.

The Marquis made the most of an opportunity that might be brief. He quite frankly declared himself, and begged, implored to be taken back into Aline's good graces, to be admitted at least to the hope that one day before very long she would bring herself to consider him in a nearer relationship.

"Mademoiselle," he told her, his voice vibrating with a feeling that admitted of no doubt, "you cannot lack conviction of my utter sincerity. The very constancy of my devotion should afford you this. It is just that I should have been banished from you, since I showed myself so utterly unworthy of the great honour to which I aspired. But this banishment has nowise diminished my devotion. If you can conceive what I have suffered, you would agree that I have fully expiated my abject fault."

She looked at him with a curious, gentle wistfulness on her lovely face.

"Monsieur, it is not you whom I doubt. It is myself."

"You mean your feelings towards me?"

"Yes."

"But that I can understand. After what has happened . . ."

"It was always so, monsieur," she interrupted, quietly. "You speak of me as if lost to you by your own action. That is to say too much. Let me be frank with you. Monsieur, I was never yours to lose. I am conscious of the honour that you do me. I esteem you very deeply . . ."

"But then," he cried, on a high note of confidence, "from such a beginning . . ."

"Who shall assure me that it is a beginning? May it not be the whole? Had I held you in affection, monsieur, I should

have sent for you after the affair of which you have spoken. I should at least not have condemned you without hearing your explanation. As it was . . ." She shrugged, smiling gently, sadly. "You see?"

But his optimism, far from being crushed, was stimulated. "But it is to give me hope, mademoiselle. If already I possess so much, I may look with confidence to win more. I shall prove myself worthy. I swear to do that. Who that is permitted the privilege of being near you could do other than seek to render himself worthy?"

And then, before she could add a word, M. de Kercadiou came blustering through the window, his spectacles on his forehead, his face inflamed, waving in his hand *The Acts of the Apostles*, and apparently reduced to speechlessness.

Had the Marquis expressed himself aloud he would have been profane. As it was, he bit his lip in vexation at this most inopportune interruption.

Aline sprang up, alarmed by her uncle's agitation.

"What has happened?"

"Happened?" He found speech at last. "The scoundrel! The faithless dog! I consented to overlook the past on the clear condition that he should avoid revolutionary politics in future. That condition he accepted, and now"—he smacked the news-sheet furiously—"he has played me false again. Not only has he gone into politics once more, but he is actually a member of the Assembly, and, what is worse, he has been using his assassin's skill as a fencing-master, turning himself into a bully swordsman. My God! Is there any law at all left in France?"

One doubt M. de La Tour d'Azyr had entertained, though only faintly, to mar the perfect serenity of his growing optimism. That doubt concerned this man Moreau and his relations with M. de Kercadiou. He knew what once they had been, and how changed they subsequently were by the ingratitude of Moreau's own behaviour in turning against the class to which his benefactor belonged. What he did not know was that a reconciliation had been effected. For in the past month—ever since circumstances had driven André-Louis to depart from his undertaking to steer clear of politics—the young man had not ventured to approach Meudon, and, as it happened, his name had not been mentioned in La Tour d'Azyr's hearing on the occasion of either of his own previous visits. He learnt of that reconciliation now; but he learnt at the same time that the breach was now renewed, and rendered wider and more impassable than ever. Therefore he did not hesitate to avow his own position.

"There is a law," he answered. "The law that this rash young

man himself evokes. The law of the sword." He spoke very gravely, almost sadly. For he realised that, after all, the ground was tender. "You are not to suppose that he is to continue indefinitely his career of evil and murder. Sooner or later he will meet a sword that will avenge the others. You have observed that my cousin Chabrilanne is among the number of this assassin's victims; that he was killed on Tuesday last."

"If I have not expressed my condolence, Azyr, it is because my indignation stifles at the moment every other feeling. The scoundrel! You say that sooner or later he will meet a sword that will avenge the others. I pray that it may be soon."

The Marquis answered him quietly, without anything but sorrow in his voice. "I think your prayer is likely to be heard. This wretched young man has an engagement to-morrow, when his account may be definitely settled."

He spoke with such calm conviction, that his words had all the sound of a sentence of death. They suddenly stemmed the flow of M. de Kercadiou's anger. The colour receded from his inflamed face; dread looked out of his pale eyes, to inform M. de La Tour d'Azyr more clearly than any words that M. de Kercadiou's hot speech had been the expression of unreflecting anger, that his prayer that retribution might soon overtake his godson had been unconsciously insincere. Confronted now by the fact that this retribution was about to be visited upon that scoundrel, the fundamental gentleness and kindness of his nature asserted itself; his anger was suddenly whelmed in apprehension; his affection for the lad beat up to the surface, making André-Louis's sin, however hideous, a thing of no account by comparison with the threatened punishment.

M. de Kercadiou moistened his lips.

"With whom is this engagement?" he asked, in a voice that by an effort he contrived to render steady.

M. de La Tour d'Azyr bowed his handsome head, his eyes upon the gleaming parquetry of the floor. "With myself," he answered quietly, conscious already with a tightening of the heart that his answer must sow dismay. He caught the sound of a faint outcry from Aline; he saw the sudden recoil of M. de Kercadiou. And then he plunged headlong into the explanation that he deemed necessary.

"In view of his relations with you, M. de Kercadiou, and because of my deep regard for you, I did my best to avoid this, even though, as you will understand, the death of my dear friend and cousin Chabrilanne seemed to summon me to action; even though I knew that my circumspection was becoming matter for criticism among my friends. But yesterday this

unbridled young man made further restraint impossible to me. He provoked me deliberately and publicly. He put upon me the very grossest affront, and . . . to-morrow morning in the Bois . . . we meet."

He faltered a little at the end, fully conscious of the hostile atmosphere in which he suddenly found himself. Hostility from M. de Kercadiou, the latter's earlier change of manner had already led him to expect; the hostility of Mademoiselle came more in the nature of a surprise.

He began to understand what difficulties the course to which he was committed must raise up for him. A fresh obstacle was to be flung across the path which he had just cleared, as he imagined. Yet his pride and his sense of the justice due to be done admitted of no weakening.

In bitterness he realised now, as he looked from uncle to niece—his glance, usually so direct and bold, now oddly furtive—that though to-morrow he might kill André-Louis, yet even by his death André-Louis would take vengeance upon him. He had exaggerated nothing in reaching the conclusion that this André-Louis Moreau was the evil genius of his life. ' He saw now that do what he would, kill him even though he might, he could never conquer him. The last word would always be with André-Louis Moreau. In bitterness, in rage, and in humiliation—a thing almost unknown to him—did he realise it, and the realisation steeled his purpose for all that he perceived its futility.

Outwardly he showed himself calm and self-contained, properly suggesting a man regretfully accepting the inevitable. It would have been as impossible to find fault with his bearing as to attempt to turn him from the matter to which he was committed. And so M. de Kercadiou perceived.

"My God!" was all that he said, scarcely above his breath, yet almost in a groan.

M. de La Tour d'Azyr did, as always, the thing that sensibility demanded of him. He took his leave. He understood that to linger where his news had produced such an effect would be impossible, indecent. So he departed, in a bitterness comparable only with his erstwhile optimism, the sweet fruit of hope turned to a thing of gall even as it touched his lips. Oh yes; the last word, indeed, was with André-Louis Moreau—always.

Uncle and niece looked at each other as he passed out, and there was horror in the eyes of both. Aline's pallor was deathly almost, and standing there now she wrung her hands as if in pain.

"Why did you not ask him—beg him . . ." She broke off.

"To what end? He was in the right, and . . . and . . .

there are things one cannot ask ; things it would be a useless humiliation to ask." He sat down, groaning, "Oh, the poor boy - the poor, misguided boy ! "

In the mind of neither, you see, was there any doubt of what must be the issue. The calm confidence in which La Tour d'Azyr had spoken compelled itself to be shared. He was no vain-glorious boaster, and they knew of what a force as a swordsman he was generally accounted.

"What does humiliation matter ? A life is at issue—André's life."

"I know. My God, don't I know ? And I would humiliate myself if by humiliating myself I could hope to prevail. But Azyr is a hard, relentless man, and . . ."

Abruptly she left him.

She overtook the Marquis as he was in the act of stepping into his carriage. He turned as she called, and bowed.

"Mademoiselle ? "

At once he guessed her errand, tasted in anticipation the unparalleled bitterness of being compelled to refuse her. Yet at her invitation he stepped back into the cool of the hall.

In the middle of the floor of chequered marbles, black and white, stood a carved table of black oak. By this he halted, leaning lightly against it whilst she sat enthroned in the great crimson chair beside it.

"Monsieur, I cannot allow you so to depart," she said. "You cannot realise, monsieur, what a blow would be dealt my uncle if . . . if evil, irrevocable evil, were to overtake his godson to-morrow. The expressions that he used at first . . ."

"Mademoiselle, I perceived their true value. Spare yourself. Believe me, I am profoundly desolated by circumstances which I had not expected to find. You must believe me when I say that. It is all that I can say."

"Must it really be all ? André is very dear to his godfather."

The pleading tone cut him like a knife ; and then suddenly it aroused another emotion—an emotion which he realised to be utterly unworthy, an emotion which, in his overwhelming pride of race, seemed almost sullyng, yet not to be repressed. He hesitated to give it utterance ; hesitated even remotely to suggest so horrible a thing as that in a man of such lowly origin he might conceivably discover a rival. Yet that sudden pang of jealousy was stronger than his monstrous pride.

"And to you, mademoiselle ? What is this André-Louis Moreau to you ? You will pardon the question. But I desire clearly to understand."

Watching her he beheld the scarlet stain that overspread her

face. He read in it at first confusion, until the gleam of her blue eyes announced its source to lie in anger. That comforted him. Since he had affronted her, he was reassured. It did not occur to him that the anger might have another source.

"André and I have been playmates from infancy. He is very dear to me, too; almost I regard him as a brother. Were I in need of help, and were my uncle not available, André would be the first man to whom I should turn. Are you sufficiently answered, monsieur? Or is there more of me you would desire revealed?"

He bit his lip. He was unnerved, he thought, this morning; otherwise the silly suspicion with which he had offended could never have occurred to him.

He bowed very low. "Mademoiselle, forgive that I should have troubled you with such a question. You have answered more fully than I could have hoped or wished."

He said no more than that. He waited for her to resume. At a loss, she sat in silence awhile, a pucker on her white brow, her fingers nervously drumming on the table. At last she flung herself headlong against the impassive polished front that he presented.

"I have come, monsieur, to beg you to put off this meeting."

She saw the faint raising of his dark eyebrows, the faintly regretful smile that scarcely did more than tinge his fine lips, and she hurried on. "What honour can await you in such an engagement, monsieur?"

It was a shrewd thrust at the pride of race that she accounted his paramount sentiment, that had as often lured him into error as it had urged him into good.

"I do not seek honour in it, mademoiselle, but—I must say it—justice. The engagement, as I have explained, is not of my seeking. It has been thrust upon me, and in honour I cannot draw back."

"Why, what dishonour would there be in sparing him? Surely, monsieur, none would call your courage in question? None could misapprehend your motives."

"You are mistaken, mademoiselle. My motives would most certainly be misapprehended. You forget that this young man has acquired in the past week a certain reputation that might well make a man hesitate to meet him."

She brushed that aside almost contemptuously, conceiving it the merest quibble.

"Some men, yes. But not you, M. le Marquis."

Her confidence in him on every count was most sweetly flattering. But there was a bitterness behind the sweet.

"Even I, mademoiselle, let me assure you. And there is more than that. This quarrel which M. Moreau has forced upon me is no new thing. It is merely the culmination of a long-drawn persecution."

"Which you invited," she cut in. "Be just, monsieur."

"I hope that it is not in my nature to be otherwise, mademoiselle."

"Consider, then, that you killed his friend."

"I find in that nothing with which to reproach myself. My justification lay in the circumstances—the subsequent events in this distracted country surely confirm it."

"And . . ." She faltered a little, and looked away from him for the first time. "And that you . . . that you . . . And what of Mademoiselle Binet, whom he was to have married?"

He stared at her for a moment in sheer surprise. "Was to have married?" he repeated, incredulously, dismayed almost.

"You did not know that?"

"But how do you?"

"Did I not tell you that we are as brother and sister almost? I have his confidence. He told me, before . . . before you made it impossible."

He looked away, chin in hand, his glance thoughtful, disturbed, almost wistful.

"There is," he said, slowly, musingly, "a singular fatality at work between that man and me, bringing us ever each by turns athwart the other's path . . ."

He sighed; then swung to face her again, speaking more briskly. "Mademoiselle, until this moment I had no knowledge—no suspicion of this thing. But . . ." He broke off, considered, and then shrugged. "If I wronged him, I did so unconsciously. It would be unjust to blame me, surely. In all our actions it must be the intention alone that counts."

"But does it make no difference?"

"None that I can discern, mademoiselle. It gives me no justification to withdraw from that to which I am irrevocably committed. No justification, indeed, could ever be greater than my concern for the pain it must occasion my good friend your uncle, and perhaps yourself, mademoiselle."

She rose suddenly, squarely, confronting him, desperate now, driven to play the only card upon which she thought she might count.

"Monsieur," she said, "you did me the honour to-day to speak in certain terms; to . . . to allude to certain hopes with which you honour me."

He looked at her almost in fear. In silence, not daring to speak, he waited for her to continue.

"I . . . I . . . Will you please to understand, monsieur, that if you persist in this matter, if . . . unless you can break this engagement of yours to-morrow morning in the Bois, you are not to presume to mention that subject to me again, or, indeed, ever again to approach me."

To put the matter in this negative way was as far as she could possibly go. It was for him to make the positive proposal to which she had thus thrown wide the door.

"Mademoiselle, you cannot mean . . ."

"I do, monsieur . . . irrevocably, please to understand."

He looked at her with eyes of misery, his handsome manly face as pale as she had ever seen it. The hand he had been holding out in protest began to shake. He lowered it to his side again, lest she should perceive its tremor. Thus a brief second, while the battle was fought within him, the bitter engagement between his desires and what he conceived to be the demands of his honour, never perceiving how far his honour was buttressed by implacable vindictiveness. Retreat, he conceived, was impossible without shame; and shame was to him an agony unthinkable. She asked too much. She could not understand what she was asking, else she would never be so unreasonable, so unjust. But also he saw that it would be futile to attempt to make her understand.

It was the end. Though he kill André-Louis Moreau in the morning, as he fiercely hoped he would, yet the victory even in death must lie with André-Louis Moreau.

He bowed profoundly grave and sorrowful of face as he was grave and sorrowful of heart.

"Mademoiselle, my homage," he murmured, and turned to go.

Startled, appalled, she stepped back, her hand pressed to her tortured breast.

"But you have not answered me," she called after him in terror.

He checked on the threshold, and turned; and there from the cool gloom of the hall she saw him, a black, graceful silhouette against the brilliant sunshine beyond—a memory of him that was to cling as something sinister and menacing in the dread hours that were to follow.

"What would you, mademoiselle? I but spared myself and you the pain of a refusal."

He was gone, leaving her crushed and raging. She sank down again into the great red chair, and sat there crumpled, her

elbows on the table, her face in her hands—a face that was on fire with shame and passion. She had offered herself and she had been refused! The inconceivable had befallen her. The humiliation of it seemed to her something that could never be effaced.

CHAPTER XI

THE RETURNING CARRIAGE

M. DE KERCADIOU wrote a letter.

Godson, he began, without any softening adjective, *I have learnt with pain and indignation that you have dishonoured yourself again by breaking the pledge you gave me to abstain from politics. With still greater pain and indignation do I learn that your name has become in a few short days a byword, that you have discarded the weapon of false insidious arguments against my class—the class to which you owe everything—for the sword of the assassin. It has come to my knowledge that you have an assignation to-morrow with my good friend M. de La Tour d'Azyr. A gentleman of his station is under certain obligations imposed upon him by his birth, which do not permit him to draw back from an engagement. But you labour under no such disadvantages. For a man of your class to refuse an engagement of honour, or to neglect it when made, entails no sacrifice. Your peers will probably be of the opinion that you display a commendable prudence. Therefore I beg you—indeed, did I think that I still exercise over you any such authority as the favours you have received from me should entitle me to exercise, I would command you—to allow this matter to go no further, and to refrain from rendering yourself to your assignation to-morrow morning. Having no such authority, as your past conduct now makes clear, having no reason to hope that a proper sentiment of gratitude to me will induce you to give heed to this my most earnest request, I am compelled to add that, should you survive to-morrow's encounter, I can in no circumstances ever again permit myself to be conscious of your existence. If any spark survives of the affection that once you expressed for me, or if you set any value upon the affection which, in spite of all that you have done to forfeit it, is the chief prompter of this letter, you will not refuse to do as I am asking.*

It was not a tactful letter. M. de Kercadiou was not a tactful man. Read it as he would, André-Louis—when it was delivered

to him on that Sunday afternoon by the groom dispatched with it into Paris—could read into it only concern for M. de La Tour d'Azyr, M. de Kercadiou's good friend, as he called him, and prospective nephew-in-law.

He kept the groom waiting a full hour while composing his answer. Brief though it was, it cost him very considerable effort and several unsuccessful attempts. In the end this is what he wrote :

Monsieur my Godfather,

You make refusal singularly hard for me when you appeal to me upon the ground of affection. It is a thing of which all my life I shall hail the opportunity to give you proofs, and I am therefore desolated beyond anything I could hope to express that I cannot give you the proof you ask to-day. There is too much between M. de La Tour d'Azyr and me. Also you do me and my class—whatever it may be—less than justice when you say that obligations of honour are not binding upon us. So binding do I count them, that, if I would, I could not now draw back.

If hereafter you should persist in the harsh intention you express, I must suffer it. That I shall suffer be assured.

Your affectionate and grateful godson,

André-Louis.

He dispatched that letter by M. de Kercadiou's groom, and conceived this to be the end of the matter. It cut him keenly ; but he bore the wound with that outward stoicism he affected.

Next morning, at a quarter past eight, as with Le Chapelier—who had come to break his fast with him—he was rising from table to set out for the Bois, his housekeeper startled him by announcing Mademoiselle de Kercadiou.

He looked at his watch. Although his cabriolet was already at the door, he had a few minutes to spare. He excused himself from Le Chapelier, and went briskly out to the anteroom.

She advanced to meet him, her manner eager, almost feverish.

"I will not affect ignorance of why you have come," he said, quickly, to make short work. "But time presses, and I warn you that only the most solid of reasons can be worth stating."

It surprised her. It amounted to a rebuff at the very outset before she had uttered a word ; and that was the last thing she had expected from André-Louis. Moreover, there was about him an air of aloofness that was unusual where she was concerned, and his voice had been singularly cold and formal.

It wounded her. She was not to guess the conclusion to which he had leapt. He made with regard to her—as was but natural, after all—the same mistake that he had made with regard to yesterday's letter from his godfather. He conceived that the mainspring of action here was solely concern for M. de La Tour d'Azyr. That it might be concern for himself never entered his mind. So absolute was his own conviction of what must be the inevitable issue of that meeting that he could not conceive of anyone entertaining a fear on his behalf.

What he assumed to be anxiety on the score of the predestined victim had irritated him in M. de Kercadiou; in Aline it filled him with cold anger. He argued from it that she had hardly been frank with him; that ambition was urging her to consider with favour the suit of M. de La Tour d'Azyr. And than this there was no spur that could have driven more relentlessly in his purpose, since to save her was in his eyes almost as momentous as to avenge the past.

She conned him searchingly, and the complete calm of him at such a time amazed her. She could not repress the mention of it.

"How calm you are, André!"

"I am not easily disturbed. It is a vanity of mine."

"But . . . Oh, André, this meeting must not take place!" She came close up to him, to set her hands upon his shoulders, and stood so, her face within a foot of his own.

"You know, of course, of some good reason why it should not?" said he.

"You may be killed," she answered him, and her eyes dilated as she spoke.

It was so far from anything that he had expected that for a moment he could only stare at her. Then he thought he had understood. He laughed as he removed her hands from his shoulders, and stepped back. This was a shallow device, childish and unworthy in her.

"Can you really think to prevail by attempting to frighten me?" he asked, and almost sneered.

"Oh, you are surely mad! M. de La Tour d'Azyr is reputed the most dangerous sword in France."

"Have you never noticed that most reputations are undeserved? Chabrilanne was a dangerous swordsman, and Chabrilanne is under-ground. La Motte-Rouge was an even more dangerous swordsman, and he is in a surgeon's hands. So are the other spadassinicides who dreamt of skewering a poor sheep of a provincial lawyer. And here to-day comes the chief, the fine flower of these bully-swordsmen. He comes

for wages long overdue. Be sure of that. So if you have no other reason to urge . . ."

It was the sarcasm of him that mystified her. Could he possibly be sincere in his assurance that he must prevail against M. de La Tour d'Azyr? To her, in her limited knowledge her mind filled with her uncle's contrary conviction, it seemed that André-Louis was only acting; he would act a part to the very end.

Be that as it might, she shifted her ground to answer him.

"You had my uncle's letter?"

"And I answered it."

"I know. But what he said, he will fulfil. Do not dream that he will relent if you carry out this horrible purpose."

"Come now, that is a better reason than the other," said he. "If there is a reason in the world that could move me, it would be that. But there is too much between La Tour d'Azyr and me. There is an oath I swore on the dead hand of Philippe de Vilmorin. I could never have hoped that God would afford me so great an opportunity of keeping it."

"You have not kept it yet," she warned him.

He smiled at her. "True!" he said. "But nine o'clock will soon be here. Tell me," he asked her suddenly, "why did you not carry this request of yours to M. de La Tour d'Azyr?"

"I did," she answered him, and flushed as she remembered her yesterday's rejection. He interpreted the flush quite otherwise.

"And he?" he asked.

"M. de La Tour d'Azyr's obligations . . ." she was beginning; then she broke off to answer shortly, "Oh, he refused."

"So, so. He must, of course, whatever it may have cost him. Yet, in his place, I should have counted the cost as nothing. But men are different, you see." He sighed. "Also in your place, had that been so, I think I should have left the matter there. But then . . ."

"I don't understand you, André."

"I am not so very obscure. Not nearly so obscure as I can be. Turn it over in your mind. It may help to comfort you presently." He consulted his watch again. "Pray use this house as your own. I must be going."

Le Chapelier put his head in at the door.

"Forgive the intrusion. But we shall be late, André, unless you . . ."

"Coming," André answered him. "If you will await my return, Aline, you will oblige me deeply. Particularly in view of your uncle's resolve."

She did not answer him. She was numbed. He took her

silence for assent, and, bowing, left her. Standing there, she heard his steps going down the stairs together with Le Chapelier's. He was speaking to his friend, and his voice was calm and normal.

Oh, he was mad—blinded by self-confidence and vanity.

As his carriage rattled away, she sat down limply, with a sense of exhaustion and nausea. She was sick and faint with horror. André-Louis was going to his death. Conviction of it—an unreasoning conviction, the result, perhaps, of all M. de Kercadiou's rantings—entering her soul. Awhile she sat thus, paralysed by hopelessness. Then she sprang up again, wringing her hands. She must do something to avert this horror. But what could she do? To follow him to the Bois and intervene there would be to make a scandal for no purpose. The conventions of conduct were all against her, offering a barrier that was not to be overstepped. Was there no one could help her?

Standing there, half-frenzied by her helplessness, she caught again a sound of vehicles and hooves on the cobbles of the street below. A carriage was approaching. It drew up with a clatter before the fencing academy. Could it be André-Louis returning? Passionately she snatched at that straw of hope. Knocking, loud and urgent, fell upon the door. She heard André-Louis's housekeeper, her wooden shoes clanking upon the stairs, hurrying down to open.

She sped to the door of the ante-room and, pulling it wide, stood breathlessly to listen. But the voice that floated up to her was not the voice she so desperately hoped to hear. It was a woman's voice asking in urgent tones for Monsieur André-Louis—a voice at first vaguely familiar, then clearly recognised: the voice of Madame de Plougastel.

Excited, she ran to the head of the narrow staircase in time to hear Madame de Plougastel exclaim in agitation:

"He has gone already? Oh, but how long since? Which way did he take?"

It was enough to inform Aline that Madame de Plougastel's errand must be akin to her own. At the moment, in the general distress and confusion of her mind, her mental vision focussed entirely on the one vital point, she found in this no matter for astonishment. The singular regard conceived by Madame de Plougastel for André-Louis seemed to her then a sufficient explanation.

Without pausing to consider, she ran down that steep staircase, calling:

"Madame! Madame!"

The portly, comely housekeeper drew aside, and the two ladies faced each other on that threshold. Madame de Plougastel

looked white and haggard, a nameless dread staring from her eyes.

"Aline! You here!" she exclaimed. And then in the urgency sweeping aside all minor considerations: "Were you also too late?" she asked.

"No, madame, I saw him. I implored him. But he would not listen."

"Oh, this is horrible!" Madame de Plougastel shuddered as she spoke. "I heard of it only half an hour ago, and I came at once, to prevent it at all costs."

The two women looked blankly, despairingly, at each other. In the sunshine-flooded street one or two shabby idlers were pausing to eye the handsome equipage with its magnificent bay horses and the two great ladies on the doorstep of the fencing academy. From across the way came the raucous voice of an itinerant bellows-mender raised in the cry of his trade.

"A raccommoder les vieux soufflets!"

Madame swung to the housekeeper.

"How long is it since Monsieur left?"

"Ten minutes, maybe; hardly more." Conceiving these great ladies to be friends of her invincible master's latest victim, the good woman preserved a decently stolid exterior.

Madame wrung her hands. "Ten minutes! Oh!" It was almost a moan. "Which way did he go?"

"The assignation is for nine o'clock in the Bois de Boulogne," Aline informed her. "Could we follow? Could we prevail if we did?"

"Ah, my God! The question is, should we come in time? At nine o'clock! And it wants but little more than a quarter of an hour. Mon Dieu! Mon Dieu!" Madame clasped and unclasped her hands in anguish. "Do you know, at least, where in the Bois they are to meet?"

"No—only that it is in the Bois."

"In the Bois!" Madame was flung into a frenzy. "The Bois is nearly half as large as Paris." But she swept breathlessly on. "Come, Aline, get in, get in!"

Then to her coachman: "To the Bois de Boulogne by way of the Cours la Reine," she commanded, "as fast as you can drive. There are ten pistoles for you if we are in time. Whip up, man."

She thrust Aline into the carriage, and sprang after her with the energy of a girl. The heavy vehicle—too heavy by far for this race with time—was moving before she had taken her seat. Rocking and lurching it went, earning the maledictions of more than one pedestrian whom it narrowly avoided crushing against a wall or trampling underfoot.

Madame sat back with closed eyes and trembling lips. Her face showed very white and drawn. Aline watched her in silence. Almost it seemed to her that Madame de Plougastel was suffering as deeply as herself, enduring an anguish of apprehension as great as her own.

Later, Aline was to wonder at this. But at the moment all the thought of which her half-numbed mind was capable was bestowed upon their desperate errand.

The carriage rolled across the Place Louis XV and out on to the Cours la Reine at last. Along that beautiful tree-bordered avenue between the Champs Elysées and the Seine, almost empty at this hour of the day, they made better speed, leaving now a cloud of dust behind them.

But fast to danger-point as was the speed, to the women in that carriage it was too slow. As they reached the barrier at the end of the Cours, nine o'clock was striking in the city behind them, and every stroke of it seemed to sound a note of doom.

Yet here at the barrier the regulations compelled a momentary halt. Aline inquired of the sergeant-in-charge how long it was since a cabriolet such as she described had gone that way. She was answered that some twenty minutes ago a vehicle had passed the barrier containing the deputy, M. Le Chapelier, and the Paladin of the Third Estate, M. Moreau. The sergeant was very well informed. He could make a shrewd guess, he said with a grin, of the business that took M. Moreau that way so early in the day.

They left him, to speed on now through the open country, following the road that continued to hug the river. They sat back: mutely despairing, staring hopelessly ahead, Aline's hand clasped tight in Madame's. In the distance, across the meadows on their right, they could see already the long dusky line of trees of the Bois, and presently the carriage swung aside following a branch of the road that turned to the right, away from the river and heading straight for the forest.

Mademoiselle broke at last the silence of hopelessness that had reigned between them since they had passed the barrier.

"Oh, it is impossible that we should come in time. Impossible!"

"Don't say it! Don't say it!" Madame cried out.

"But it is long past nine, madame! André would be punctual, and these . . . affairs do not take long. It . . . it will be all over by now."

Madame shivered and closed her eyes. Presently however, she opened them again, and stirred. Then she put her head

from the window. "A carriage is approaching," she announced, and her hoarse tone conveyed the thing she feared.

"Not already! Oh, not already!" Thus Aline expressed the silently-communicated thought. She experienced a difficulty in breathing, felt the sudden need of air. Something in her throat was throbbing as if it would suffocate her; a mist came and went before her eyes.

In a cloud of dust an open calèche was speeding towards them, coming from the Bois. They watched it, both pale, neither venturing to speak—Aline, indeed, without breath to do so.

As it approached, it slowed down, perforce, as they did, to effect a safe passage in that narrow road. Aline was at the window with Madame de Plougastel, and with fearful eyes both looked into this open carriage that was drawing abreast of them.

"Which of them is it, madame? Oh, which of them?" gasped Aline, scarce daring to look, her senses swimming.

On the near side sat a swarthy young gentleman unknown to either of the ladies. He was smiling as he spoke to his companion. A moment later and the man sitting beyond came into view. He was not smiling. His face was white and set, and it was the face of the Marquis de La Tour d'Azyr.

For a long moment, in speechless horror, both women stared at him, until, perceiving them, blankest surprise invaded his stern face.

In that moment, with a long shuddering sigh, Aline sank swooning to the carriage floor behind Madame de Plougastel.

CHAPTER XII

INFERENCES

By fast driving André-Louis had reached the ground some minutes ahead of time, notwithstanding the slight delay in setting out. There he had found M. de La Tour d'Azyr already awaiting him, supported by a M. d'Ormesson, a swarthy young gentleman in the blue uniform of a captain in the Gardes du Corps.

André-Louis had been silent and preoccupied throughout that drive. He was perturbed by his last interview with Mademoiselle du Kercadiou and the rash inferences which he had drawn as to her motives.

"Decidedly," he had said, "this man must be killed."

Le Chapelier had not answered him. Almost, indeed, had

the Bréton shuddered at his compatriot's cold-bloodedness. He had often of late thought that this fellow Moreau was hardly human. Also he had found him incomprehensibly inconsistent. When first this spadassinicide business had been proposed to him, he had been so very lofty and disdainful. Yet having embraced it, he went about it at times with a ghoulish flippancy that was revolting, at times with a detachment that was more revolting still.

Their preparations were made quickly and in silence, yet without undue haste or other sign of nervousness on either side. In both men the same grim determination prevailed. The opponent must be killed; there could be no half-measures here. Stripped each of coat and waistcoat, shoeless, and with shirt-sleeves rolled to the elbow, they faced each other at last, with the common resolve of paying in full the long score that stood between them. I doubt if either of them entertained a misgiving as to what must be the issue.

Beside them, and opposite each other, stood Le Chapelier and the young captain, alert and watchful.

"Allez, messieurs!"

The slender, wickedly delicate blades clashed together, and after a momentary glassade were whirling, swift and bright as lightning, and almost as impossible to follow with the eye.

The Marquis led the attack, impetuously and vigorously; and almost at once André-Louis realised that he had to deal with an opponent of a very different mettle from those successive duellists of last week, not excluding La Motte-Royau of terrible reputation.

Here was a man whom much and constant practice had given extraordinary speed and a technique that was almost perfect. In addition, he enjoyed over André-Louis physical advantages of strength and length of reach, which rendered him altogether formidable. And he was cool, too; cool and self-contained; fearless and purposeful. Would anything shake that calm? wondered André-Louis.

He desired the punishment to be as full as he could make it. Not content to kill the Marquis as the Marquis had killed Philippe, he desired that he should first know himself as powerless to avert that death as Philippe had been. Nothing less would content André-Louis. M. le Marquis must begin by tasting of that cup of despair. It was in the account, part of the quittance due.

As with a breaking sweep André-Louis parried the heavy lunge in which that first series of passes culminated, he actually laughed—gleefully, like a boy at a sport he loves.

That extraordinary, ill-timed laugh made M. de La Tour d'Azyr's recovery hastier and less correctly dignified than it would otherwise have been. It startled and discomposed him who had already been discomposed by the failure to get home with a lunge so beautifully timed and so truly delivered.

He, too, had realised that his opponent's force was above anything that he could have expected, fencing-master though he might be, and on that account he had put forth his utmost energy to make an end at once.

More than the actual parry, the laugh by which it was accompanied seemed to make of that end no more than a beginning. And yet it was the end of something. It was the end of that absolute confidence that had hitherto inspired M. de la Tour d'Azyr. He no longer looked upon the issue as a thing foregone. He realised that if he was to prevail in this encounter he must go warily and fence as he had never fenced yet in all his life.

They settled down again ; and again—on the principle this time that the soundest defence is in attack—it was the Marquis who made the game. André-Louis allowed him to do so, desired him to do so ; desired him to spend himself and that magnificent speed of his against the greater speed that whole days of fencing in succession for nearly two years had given the master. With a beautiful, easy pressure of forte on foible André-Louis kept himself completely covered in that second bout, which once more culminated in a lunge.

Expecting it now, André-Louis parried it by no more than a deflecting touch. At the same moment he stepped suddenly forward, right within the other's guard, thus placing his man so completely at his mercy that, as if fascinated, the Marquis did not even attempt to recover himself.

This time André-Louis did not laugh. He just smiled into the dilating eyes of M. de La Tour d'Azyr and made no shift to use his advantage.

"Come come monsieur!" he bade him, sharply. "Am I to run my blade through an uncovered man?" Deliberately he fell back whilst his shaken opponent recovered himself at last.

M. d'Ormesson released the breath which horror had for a moment caught. Le Chapelier swore softly muttering:

'Name of a name!' It is tempting Providence to play the fool in this fashion!

André-Louis observed the ashen pallor that now overspread the face of his opponent.

"I think you begin to realise, monsieur, what Philippe de

Vilmorin must have felt that day at Gavrilac. I desired that you should first do so. Since that is accomplished why, here's to make an end."

He went in with lightning rapidity. For a moment his point seemed to La Tour d'Azyr to be everywhere at once, and then from a low engagement in sixte, André-Louis stretched forward with swift and vigorous ease to lunge in tierce. He drove his point to transfix his opponent, whom a series of calculated disengages uncovered in that line. But to his amazement and chagrin, La Tour d'Azyr parried the stroke, infinitely more to his chagrin La Tour d'Azyr parried it just too late. Had he completely parried it, all would yet have been well. But striking the blade in the last fraction of a second the Marquis deflected the point from the line of his body, yet not so completely but that a couple of feet of that hard-driven steel tore through the muscles of his sword-arm.

To the seconds none of these details had been visible. All that they had seen had been the swift whirl of flashing blades, and then André-Louis stretched almost to the ground in an upward lunge that had pierced the Marquis's right arm just below the shoulder.

The sword fell from the suddenly relaxed grip of La Tour d'Azyr's fingers, which had been rendered powerless, and he stood now disarmed, his lip in his teeth, his face white, his chest heaving, before his opponent, who had at once recovered. With the blood-tinged tip of his sword resting on the ground, André-Louis surveyed him grimly, as we survey the prey that through our own clumsiness has escaped us at the last moment.

In the Assembly and in the newspapers this might be hailed as another victory for the Paladin of the Third Estate; only himself could know the extent and the bitterness of the failure.

M. d'Ormesson had sprung to the side of his principal.

"You are hurt!" he had cried, stupidly.

"It is nothing," said La Tour d'Azyr. "A scratch." But his lip writhed, and the torn sleeve of his fine cambric shirt was full of blood.

D'Ormesson, a practical man in such matters, produced a linen kerchief which he tore quickly into strips to improvise a bandage.

Still André-Louis continued to stand there, looking on as if bemused. He continued so until Le Chapelier touched him on the arm. Then at last he roused himself, sighed, and turned away to resume his garments, nor did he address or look again at his late opponent, but left the ground at once.

As with Le Chapelier, he was walking slowly and in silent

dejection towards the entrance of the Bois, where they had left their carriage, they were passed by the calèche conveying La Tour d'Azyr and his second—which had originally driven almost right up to the spot of the encounter. The Marquis's wounded arm was carried in a sling improvised from his companion's word-belt. His sky-blue coat with three collars had been buttoned over this, so that the right sleeve hung empty. Otherwise, saving a certain pallor, he looked much his usual self.

And now you understand how it was that he was the first to return, and that seeing him thus returning, apparently safe and sound, the two ladies intent upon preventing the encounter should have assumed that their worst fears were realised.

Madame de Plougastel attempted to call out, but her voice refused its office. She attempted to throw open the door of her own carriage, but her fingers fumbled clumsily and ineffectively with the handle. And meanwhile the calèche was slowly passing, La Tour d'Azyr's fine eyes sombrely yet intently meeting her own anguished gaze. And then she saw something else. M. d'Ormesson; leaning back again from the forward inclination of his body to join his own to his companions salutation of the Countess, disclosed the empty right sleeve of M. de La Tour d'Azyr's blue coat. More, the near side of the coat itself, turned back from the point near the throat where it was caught together by a single button, revealed the slung arm beneath in its blood-sodden cambric sleeve.

Even now she feared to jump to the obvious conclusion—feared lest perhaps the Marquis, though wounded himself, might have dealt his adversary a deadlier wound.

She found her voice at last, and at the same moment signalled to the driver of the calèche to stop.

As it was pulled to a standstill M. d'Ormesson alighted, and so met Madame in the little space between the two carriages.

"Where is M. Moreau?" was the question with which she surprised him.

"Following at his leisure, no doubt, madame," he answered, recovering.

"He is not hurt?"

"Unfortunately it is we who . . ." M. d'Ormesson was beginning, when from behind him M. de La Tour d'Azyr's voice cut in crisply:

"This interest on your part in M. Moreau, dear Countess . . ."

He broke off, observing a vague challenge in the air with which she confronted him. But indeed his sentence did not need completing.

There was a vaguely awkward pause. And then she looked

at M. d'Ormesson. Her manner changed. She offered what appeared to be an explanation of her concern for M. Moreau.

"Mademoiselle de Kercadiou is with me. The poor child has fainted."

There was more, a deal more, she would have said just then but for M. d'Ormesson's presence.

Moved by a deep solicitude for Mademoiselle de Kercadiou, M. de La Tour d'Azyr sprang up despite his wound.

"I am in poor case to render assistance, madame," he said, an apologetic smile on his pale face. "But . . ."

With the aid of d'Ormesson, and in spite of the latter's protestations, he got down from the calèche, which then moved on a little way, so as to leave the road clear for another carriage that was approaching from the direction of the Bois.

And thus it happened that when a few moments later that approaching cabriolet overtook and passed the halted vehicles André-Louis beheld a very touching scene. Standing up to obtain a better view, he saw Aline in a half-swooning condition—she was beginning to revive by now—seated in the doorway of the carriage, supported by Madame de Plougastel. In an attitude of deepest concern, M. de La Tour d'Azyr, his wound notwithstanding, was bending over the girl, whilst behind him stood M. d'Ormesson and Madame's footman.

The Countess looked up and saw him as he was driven past. Her face lighted; almost it seemed to him she was about to greet him or to call him, wherefore, to avoid a difficulty, arising out of the presence there of his late antagonist, he anticipated her by bowing frigidly—for his mood was frigid, the more frigid by virtue of what he saw—and then resumed his seat with eyes that looked deliberately ahead.

Could anything more completely have confirmed him in his conviction that it was on M. de La Tour d'Azyr's account that Aline had come to plead with him that morning? For what his eyes had seen, of course, was a lady overcome with emotion at the sight of blood of her dear friend, and that same dear friend restoring her with assurances that his hurt was very far from mortal. Later, much later, he was to blame his own perverse stupidity. Almost is he too severe in his self-condemnation. For how else could he have interpreted the scene he beheld, his preconceptions being what they were?

That which he had already been suspecting he now accounted proven to him. Aline had been wanting in candour on the subject of her feelings towards M. de La Tour d'Azyr. It was, he supposed, a woman's way to be secretive in such matters, and he must not blame her. Nor could he blame her in his heart for

having succumbed to the singular charm of such a man as the Marquis—for not even his hostility could blind him to M. de La Tour d'Azyr's attractions. That she had succumbed was betrayed, he thought, by the weakness that had overtaken her upon seeing him wounded.

"My God!" he cried aloud. "What must she have suffered, then, if I had killed him as I intended?"

If only she had used candour with him, she could so easily have won his consent to the thing she asked. If only she had told him what now he saw, that she loved M. de La Tour d'Azyr, instead of leaving him to assume her only regard for the Marquis to be based on unworthy worldly ambition, he would at once have yielded.

He fetched a sigh, and breathed a prayer for forgiveness to the shade of Vilmorin.

"It is perhaps as well that my lunge went wide," he said.

"What do you mean?" wondered Le Chapelier.

"That in this business I must relinquish all hope of recommending."

CHAPTER XIII

TOWARDS THE CLIMAX

M. DE LA TOUR D'AZYR was seen no more in the Manège—or indeed in Paris at all—throughout all the months that the National Assembly remained in session to complete its work of providing France with a Constitution. After all, though the wound to his body had been comparatively slight, the wound to such a pride as his had been all but mortal.

The rumour ran that he had emigrated. But that was only half the truth. The whole of it was that he had joined that group of noble travellers who came and went between the Tuileries and the headquarters of the emigrés at Coblenz. He became, in short, a member of the royalist secret service that in the end was to bring down the monarchy in ruins.

That time, however, was not yet. For the present the royalists continued to find the innovators more or less droll; they continued to laugh at them, and, laughing, edited their merry sheet, *The Acts of the Apostles*, in the Palais Royal.

One visit M. de La Tour d'Azyr had paid to Meudon. He was well received by M. de Kercadiou, who, after all, had no quarrel

with him. But Mademoiselle kept her chamber, firm in her expressed resolve never again to receive him. It nowise modified her resolve that André-Louis should not have been harmed in the encounter. At a certain price, implied, she had offered herself to M. le Marquis, and he had refused to buy. The abiding humiliation of that thought alone precluded the possibility of her ever consenting to see M. le Marquis again.

That unalterable resolve of hers was delicately conveyed to him by M. de Kercadiou. Understanding the enormity of his offence from her point of view, he took his leave in hopelessness, and returned no more.

As for André-Louis, without reason to hope that M. de Kercadiou would depart from his written word, he submitted without attempting to combat a decision which he assumed to be irrevocable. His godfather's house saw him no more. But twice in the course of that winter he saw M. de Kercadiou and Aline; once in the Galéri de Bois in the Palais Royal, when bows were distantly exchanged between them, and on another occasion in a box at the Théâtre Français, when they did not see him at all. Aline he saw on yet a third occasion, and again in a box at the theatre—this time with Madame de Plougastel. That was early in the following Spring, and again Aline did not see him.

Meanwhile he went about his duties in the Assembly with what zest he could, and also attended to the direction of his fencing academy, which continued to prosper exceedingly, having received an enormous impetus from his performances in the Bois during that memorable September week. Subsisting now almost entirely on the eighteen francs a day of his salary as a deputy, his already considerable savings began to mount up. These he was prudently investing in Germany. He sold such shares as he had acquired in the Compagnie des Eaux and his bonds of the Caisse d'Escompte, and disposed of the proceeds through a German banker in the Rue Dauphine. He purchased during those two years some considerable property in the neighbourhood of Dresden. He would have preferred his native country. But the tenure of land in France appeared to him, and rightly, to be insecure. To-day one group of Frenchmen had dispossessed another; to-morrow another group might dispossess those who had come forward to purchase the last dispossessions.

And now we come to what is perhaps the bulkiest portion of the "Confessions," and in some ways the most interesting—being that portion which takes rank among the *mémoires pour servir* of this epoch. He describes the busy, active life of Paris as he saw it and the principal events in the Assembly. He tells us of

the completely peaceful and orderly condition now restored, of the impetus received by industry, the abundance of work for all hands, and the reign of economic prosperity that appeared definitely to have set in throughout France. The revolution was accomplished, he says, quoting the words as used by Dupont in the Assembly. And so it was provided that the Crown would accept in good faith the work which had been done, content to govern constitutionally, its own power defined, circumscribed and subordinated to the will of the nation and the general weal.

But would the Crown so accept all this? That was the question agitating all minds, begetting a certain measure of suspense. Men look backwards at each step taken since that first gathering of the States General in the Hall of the Menus Plaisirs at Versailles two years ago, and, seeing how often faith had been broken, doubted with reason that it would now be kept. It was because of these doubts and mistrusts—which centred particularly upon the Queen and those immediately about her—that suspense persisted. There was a sense—an intuition almost—that much still remained to be done before France could rest secure in the enjoyment of this legal equality she had so laboriously created for her children. How many obstacles were yet to be overcome, what horrors were yet to be traversed, no man in that Spring of 1791—not even the extremists of the Cordeliers and similar societies—could even remotely conceive.

Meanwhile this epoch of prosperity and false peace endured until the King's flight to Varennes in the following June—the fruition of all that secret coming and going between Paris and Coblenz. That flight, dispelling by the bad faith it evinced the last illusion, put an end to peaceful conditions and introduced a reign of turbulence. The manner of His Majesty's ignominious return under guard, like a runaway schoolboy brought home to be birched, and the subsequent events of that year down to the dissolution of the Constituent Assembly, are all described elsewhere, and are so little concerned with the story that is our principal consideration, that I spare you their repetition from the point of view of André-Louis.

The dissolution of the Assembly followed in September. Its work was accomplished. The King came to the Manège to receive and pronounce his acceptance of the Constitution. The revolution was indeed accomplished.

There followed the election of the Legislative Assembly, in which André-Louis once more represented Ancenis. Because in the Constituent he had been no more than a deputy-suppléant, he was not under the decree passed on the motion of Robespierre

that no member of the Constituent should be a member of the Legislative. Had he observed the spirit as well as the letter of the law he would have refrained from re-election. But so warmly was he desired by Ancenis and urged by Le Chapelier who himself was going into enforced retirement, that he submitted. It was a matter that offended no one. His exploits as the Paladin of the Third Estate had rendered him popular with all parties, even the members of the old Côté Droit, and in the Jacobins, where he had spoken once or twice, he had been well received and was well regarded. It was expected of him in those days that he would do great things. Almost, I think he expected it of himself, for he confesses frankly that he shared at the time the fairly widespread error that the revolution was a thing accomplished. France had now but to govern herself upon the lines laid down by the Constitution which had been given to her.

He left—as did those who shared that view—two factors out of his calculation: the fact that the Court could not bring itself to accept the altered state of things, and the fact that the new Assembly had not the experience necessary to master the intrigues and fractions of the Court. The Legislative was an Assembly of young men, few of them being much above the age limit of twenty-five. Lawyers predominated, and among these that group of lawyers from the Gironde inspired by so lofty republicanism; but they were young lawyers without experience of affairs, and during critical early days they were to flounder helplessly, and by their floundering and displays of weakness, encourage the Court party to deliver battle once again.

At first it was a battle but of words, a battle of newspapers, conducted between such organs as *L'Ami du Roy* and *L'Ami du Peuple*—a sheet that had lately made its appearance furiously edited by the Philanthropist Marat.

Public irritation began to manifest itself once more, public nerves at perpetual strain by revolution and counter-revolution were beginning to threaten crises. And now half Europe was aiming to hurl herself upon France, and her quarrel with France was the quarrel of the French King. That was the horror at the root of all the horrors that were to come. That was what gave their opportunity to the Marats, the Dantons, the Héberts, and all the rest of the extremists who stirred up the populace.

And whilst the Court prosecuted its intrigues whilst the Jacobins, led by Robespierre, waged war against the Girondins who, under the great leadership of Vergniaud and Brisset, were gradually finding themselves, whilst the Feuillants waged war equally against both and whilst the torch of foreign war was

alight on the frontier and that of civil war was being secretly kindled at home. André-Louis was removed from the hub itself.

Of the counter-revolutionary troubles that were everywhere being stirred up by the clergy, none were more acute than those of Brittany, and in view of his antecedents and the influence which he was—quite exaggeratedly—deemed to wield in his native province, it was natural that the Commission of Twelve should propose to him in the early days of the Girondin ministry, and on the suggestion of Roland, that he should go down to Brittany to combat, by peaceful means if possible the evil influences at work.

It was a matter in which the municipalities had clear and well-timed powers. But many of the municipalities were themselves growing suspect for their singular inaction before the steadily spreading reactionary sentiments. Hence he need to send down an elected representative with fullest powers to arouse the municipalities to a sense of their danger. He was desired to proceed peacefully; but that he was empowered to have recourse to other measures is clear from the nature of the orders he carried—orders enjoining upon all Frenchmen, in the name of the nation, to render him all possible assistance, and warning those who hindered him that they would do so at their peril.

He accepted the task and so he was one of five similar plenipotentiaries dispatched on the same errand in that Spring of 1792—which saw for the first time the philanthropic Dr. Guillotin's engine of painful death erected in the Carrousel—into the provincial departments, forerunners in a sense of the representatives *en mission* so common later on under the National Convention.

Considering what afterwards happened in Brittany, it cannot be pretended that his mission achieved the success that was expected. That however, is no part of our present concern. It kept him absent from Paris for some four months, and might have engaged him longer, and perhaps to better purpose, but that at the beginning of August he was recalled. More imminent than any trouble in Brittany was the trouble brewing at home in Paris itself, where the political sky was blacker than it had been since '89.

Of this trouble André-Louis saw signs and heard rumours ever increasing as his berline bore him eastwards towards the capital. Into that powder magazine that Paris was become the torch had been recklessly cast by the manifesto of their Majesties of Prussia and Austria, a manifesto declaring responsible for all events and to be dealt with in summary military

fashion all members of the Assembly, of departments, of districts, of municipalities, the very justices of the peace, and the soldiers of the National Guard.

It was a declaration of war of an unprecedented kind—a declaration of war, not against France, but against one section of France. And the amazing thing is that this manifesto, published in Coblenz on the 26th of July, was known already in Paris on the 28th, justifying those who denounced its real source as being not Coblenz at all, but the Tuileries. Madame de Campan's *mémoires* also afford this a certain measure of confirmation when they betray the fact that the Queen, her mistress, was in possession of the itinerary prepared by the Prussians who stood in arms at the gates of France. Even in those days the methodical Prussians planned, it would appear, by the calendar. Her Majesty was able to give Madame de Campan full details of that itinerary. On such a day the Prussians would be at Verdun; on such a day at Chalons, and on such a day before the walls of Paris, of which Bouillé had sworn that not one stone should remain upon another.

And Paris, receiving this manifesto, receiving the news of it prematurely, understood that it was the gage of battle flung down not by Prussia, but by the old detested and detestable régime which the Constitution was believed to have swept away for ever. France saw—or justifiably thought she saw—revealed in full at last the bad faith in which that Constitution had been accepted. She perceived that her last resource lay in insurrection, so that she might anticipate as far as possible her coercion by foreign armies. In Paris itself there were still at the time all the provincial federates who had come up for the national festival of the fourteenth of July, including the bands of the Marseillais who had marched from the South to the rhythm of that new hymn of theirs that was presently to resound so terribly. It was Danton who had detained them in the capital, forewarned of what was brewing.

And now, in full view of each other, each side proceeded to arm. The Swiss were fetched up from Courbevoie to the Tuileries, the Chevaliers du Poignard—a band of gentlemen numbering some hundreds sworn to the defence of the Throne, and including in its ranks M. de La Tour d'Azyr, lately returned from the camp of the émigrés beyond the frontier—assembled in the royal palace when their place as Frenchmen was with the Army of the North. In the sections the forging of pikes was renewed, muskets were unearthed, cartridges procured and distributed, and hostilities were declared in petitions to the Assembly itself. Paris realised that the hour was rapidly

approaching which would see the climax of this long struggle between Equality and Privilege. And it was towards a city so disposed that André-Louis came speeding from the West to find there also the climax of his own disturbed career.

CHAPTER XIV

THE OVERWHELMING REASON

MADemoiselle DE KERCADIOU was in Paris in those days of early August on a visit to her uncle's cousin and dearest friend, Madame de Plougastel. And although nothing could now be plainer than the seething unrest that heralded the explosion to come, yet the air of gaiety, indeed of jocularly, prevailing at Court—whither Madame and Mademoiselle went almost daily—reassured them. M. de Plougastel had come and gone again, back to Coblenz on that secret business that kept him now almost constantly absent from his wife. But whilst with her he had positively assured her that all measures were taken, and that an insurrection was a thing to be welcomed, because it could have only one conclusion, the final crushing of the revolution in the courtyard of the Tuileries. That, he added, was why the King remained in Paris. But for his confidence in that, he would put himself in the centre of his Swiss and his knights of the dagger, and quit the capital. They would hack a way out for him easily if his departure were opposed. But not even that would be necessary.

Yet in those early days of August, after her husband's departure, the effect of his inspiring words was gradually dissipated by the march of events under Madame's own eyes. And finally, on the afternoon of the ninth, there arrived at the Hôtel Plougastel a messenger from Meudon bearing a note from M. de Kercadiou in which he urgently bade Mademoiselle join him there at once, and advised her hostess to accompany her.

You may have realised that M. de Kercadiou was of those who make friends with men of all classes. His ancient lineage placed him on terms of equality with members of the noblesse; his simple manners—something between the rustic and the bourgeois—and his natural affability placed him on equally good terms with those who by birth were his inferiors. In Meudon he was known and esteemed of all the simple folk and it was Rougane, the friendly mayor, who, informed on the ninth of

August of the storm that was brewing for the morrow, and knowing of Mademoiselle's absence in Paris, had warningly advised him to withdraw her from what in the next twenty-four hours might be a zone of danger for all persons of quality, particularly those suspected of connections with the Court party.

Now there was no doubt whatever of Madame de Plougastel's connection with the Court. It was not even to be doubted—indeed, a measure of proof of it was to be forthcoming—that those vigilant and ubiquitous secret societies that watched over the cradle of the young revolution were fully informed of the frequent journeyings of M. de Plougastel to Coblenz, and entertained no illusions on the score of the reason for them. Given, then, a defeat of the Court party in the struggle that was preparing, the position in Paris of Madame de Plougastel could not be other than fraught with danger, and that danger would be shared by any guest of birth at her hotel.

M. de Kercadiou's affection for both those women quickened the fears aroused in him by Rougane's warning. Hence that hastily dispatched note desiring his niece, and imploring this friend to come at once to Meudon.

The friendly mayor carried his complaisance a step further, and dispatched a letter to Paris by the hands of his own son, an intelligent lad of nineteen. It was late in the afternoon of that perfect August day when young Rougane presented himself at the Hôtel Plougaste..

He was graciously received by Madame de Plougastel in the salon, whose splendours when combined with the great air of the lady herself overwhelmed the lad's simple, unsophisticated soul. Madame made up her mind at once. M. de Kercadiou's urgent message no more than confirmed her own fears and inclinations. She decided upon instant departure.

"Bien, madame," said the youth; "then I have the honour to take my leave."

But she would not let him go. First to the kitchen to refresh himself, whilst she and Mademoiselle made ready, and then a seat for him in her carriage as far as Meudon. She could not suffer him to return on foot as he had come.

Though in all the circumstances it was no more than his due, yet the kindness that in such a moment of agitation could take thought for another was presently to be rewarded. Had she done less than this, she would have known—if nothing worse—at least some hours of anguish even greater than those that were already in store for her.

It wanted perhaps a half-hour to sunset when they set out in her carriage with intent to leave Paris by the Porte St. Martin

They travelled with a single footman behind. Rougane—terrifying condescension—was given a seat inside the carriage with the ladies, and proceeded to fall in love with Mademoiselle de Kercadiou, whom he accounted the most beautiful being he had ever seen, yet who talked to him simply and unaffectedly as with an equal. The thing went to his head a little, and disturbed certain republican notions which he had hitherto conceived himself to have thoroughly digested.

The carriage drew up at the barrier, checked there by a picket of the National Guard posted before the iron gates.

The sergeant in command strode to the door of the vehicle. The Countess put her head from the window.

"The barrier is closed, madame," she was curtly informed.

"Closed?" she echoed. The thing was incredible. "But . . . but do you mean—that we cannot pass?"

"Not unless you have a permit, madame." The sergeant leaned nonchalantly on his pike. "The orders are that no one is to leave or enter without proper papers."

"Whose orders?"

"Orders of the Commune of Paris."

"But I must go into the country this evening." Madame's voice was almost petulant. "I am expected."

"In that case let madame procure a permit."

"Where is it to be procured?"

"At the Hôtel de Ville or at the headquarters of Madame's section."

She considered a moment. "To the section, then. Be so good as to tell my coachman to drive to the Bondy Section."

He saluted her and stepped back. "Section Bondy, Rue des Morts," he bade the driver.

Madame sank back into her seat again, in a state of agitation fully shared by Mademoiselle. Rougane set himself to pacify and reassure them. The section would put the matter in order. They would most certainly be accorded a permit. What possible reason could there be for refusing them? A mere formality after all!

His assurance uplifted them merely to prepare them for a still more profound dejection when presently they met with a flat refusal from the president of the section who received the Countess.

"Your name, madame?" he had asked, brusquely. A rude fellow of the most advanced republican type, he had not even risen out of deference to the ladies when they entered. He was there, he would have told you, to perform the duties of his office, not to give dancing lessons.

"Plougastel," he repeated after her, without title, as if it had

been the name of a butcher or baker. He took down a heavy volume from a shelf on his right, opened it and turned the pages. It was a sort of directory of his section. Presently he found what he sought. "Comte de Plougastel, Hôtel Plougastel, Rue du Paradis. Is that it?"

"That is correct, monsieur," she answered, with what civility she could muster before the fellow's affronting rudeness.

There was a long moment of silence, during which he studied certain pencilled entries against the name. The sections had been working in the last few weeks much more systematically than was generally suspected.

"Your husband is with you, madame?" he asked curtly, his eyes still conning that page.

"M. le Comte is not with me," she answered, stressing the title.

"Not with you?" He looked up suddenly, and directed upon her a glance in which suspicion seemed to blend with derision. "Where is he?"

"He is not in Paris, monsieur."

"Ah! Is he at Coblenz, do you think?"

Madame felt herself turning cold. There was something ominous in all this. To what end had the sections informed themselves so thoroughly of the comings and goings of their inhabitants? What was preparing? She had a sense of being trapped, of being taken in a net that had been cast unseen.

"I do not know, monsieur," she said, her voice unsteady.

"Of course not." He seemed to sneer. "No matter. And you wish to leave Paris also? Where do you desire to go?"

"To Meudon."

"Your business there?"

The blood leapt to her face. His insolence was unbearable to a woman who in all her life had never known anything but the utmost deference from inferiors and equals alike. Nevertheless, realising that she was face to face with forces entirely new she controlled herself, stifled her resentment, and answered steadily:

"I wish to conduct this lady, Mademoiselle de Kercadiou, back to her uncle who resides there."

"Is that all? Another day will do for that, madame. The matter is not pressing."

"Pardon, monsieur, to us the matter is very pressing."

"You have not convinced me of it and the barriers are closed to all who cannot prove the most urgent and satisfactory reasons for wishing to pass. You will wait, madame, until the restriction is removed. Good-evening."

"But, monsieur . . ."

"Good-evening, madame," he repeated, significantly. It was a dismissal more contemptuous and despotic than the royal formula. "You have leave to go."

Madame went out with Aline. Both were quivering with the anger that prudence had urged them to suppress. They climbed into the coach again, desiring to be driven home.

Rougane's astonishment turned to dismay when they told him what had taken place. "Why not try the Hôtel de Ville, madame?" he suggested.

"After that? It would be useless. We must resign ourselves to remaining in Paris until the barriers are opened again."

"Perhaps it will not matter to us either way by then, madame," said Aline.

"Aline!" she exclaimed in horror.

"Mademoiselle!" cried Rougane on the same note. And then because he perceived that people detained in this fashion must be in some danger not yet discernible, but on that account more dreadful, he set his wits to work. As they were approaching the Hôtel Plougastel once more, he announced that he had solved the problem.

"A passport from without would do equally well," he announced. "Listen now, and trust to me. I will go back to Meudon at once. My father shall give me two permits—one for myself alone, and another for three persons—from Meudon to Paris and back to Meudon. I re-enter Paris with my own permit, which I then proceed to destroy, and we leave together, we three, on the strength of the other one, representing ourselves as having come from Meudon in the course of the day. It is quite simple after all. If I go at once, I shall be back to-night."

"But how will you leave?" asked Aline.

"I? Pooh! As to that, have no anxiety. My father is Mayor of Meudon. There are plenty who know him. I will go to the Hotel de Ville, and tell them what is, after all, true—that I am caught in Paris by the closing of the barriers, and that my father is expecting me home this evening. They will pass me through. It is quite simple."

His confidence uplifted them again. The thing seemed as easy as he represented it.

"Then let your passport be for four, my friend," Madame begged him. "There is Jacques," she explained, indicating the footman who had just assisted them to alight.

Rougane departed, confident of soon returning, leaving them to await him with the same confidence. But the hours succeeded

one another, the night closed in, bedtime came, and still there was no sign of his return.

They waited until midnight, each pretending for the other's sake to a confidence fully sustained, each invaded by vague premonitions of evil, yet beguiling the time by playing tric-trac in the great salon, as if they had not a single anxious thought between them.

At last, on the stroke of midnight, Madame sighed and rose.

"It will be for to-morrow morning," she said not believing it.

"Of course," Aline agreed. "It would really have been impossible for him to have returned to-night. And it will be much better to travel to-morrow. The journey at so late an hour would tire you so much, dear madame."

Thus they made pretence.

Early in the morning they were awakened by a din of bells—the tocsin of the sections ringing the alarm. To their startled ears came later the rolling of drums, and at one time they heard the sounds of a multitude on the march. Paris was rising. Later still came the rattle of small arms in the distance and the booming of cannon. Battle was joined between the men of the sections and the men of the Court. The people in arms had attacked the Tuileries. Wildest rumours flew in all directions, and some of them found their way through the servants to the Hôtel Plougastel, of that terrible fight for the palace which was to end in the purposeless massacre of all those whom the invertebrate monarch abandoned there, whilst placing himself and his family under the protection of the Assembly. Purposeless to the end, ever adopting the course pointed out to him by evil counsellors, he prepared for resistance only until the need for resistance really arose, whereupon he ordered a surrender which left those who had stood by him to the last at the mercy of a frenzied mob.

And while this was happening in the Tuileries, the two women at the Hôtel Plougastel still waited for the return of Rougane, though now with ever-lessening hope. And Rougane did not return. The affair did not appear so simple to the father as to the son. Rougane the elder was rightly afraid to lend himself to such a piece of deception.

He went with his son to inform M. de Kercadiou of what had happened, and told him frankly of the thing his son suggested, but which he dared not do.

M. de Kercadiou sought to move him by intercessions and even by the offer of bribes. But Rougane remained firm.

"Monsieur," he said, "if it were discovered against me as it

inevitably would be, I should hang for it. Apart from that, and in spite of my anxiety to do all in my power to serve you, it would be a breach of trust such as I could not contemplate. You must not ask me, monsieur."

"But what do you conceive is going to happen?" asked the half-demented gentleman.

"It is war," said Rougane, who was well informed, as we have seen. "War between the people and the Court. I am desolated that my warning should have come too late. But, when all is said, I do not think that you need really alarm yourself. War will not be made on women."

M. de Kercadiou clung for comfort to that assurance after the mayor and his son had departed. But at the back of his mind there remained the knowledge of the traffic in which M. de Plougastel was engaged. What if the revolutionaries were equally well informed? And most probably they were. The womenfolk of political offenders had been known aforetime to suffer for the sins of their man. Anything was possible in a popular upheaval, and Aline would be exposed jointly with Madame de Plougastel.

Late that night, as he sat gloomily in his brother's library, the pipe in which he had sought solace extinguished between his fingers, there came a sharp knocking at the door.

To the old seneschal of Gavrilac who went to open there stood revealed upon the threshold a slim young man in a dark olive surcoat, the skirts of which reached down to his calves. He wore boots, buckskins, and a small-sword, and round his waist there was a tricolour sash, in his hat a tricolour cockade, which gave him an official look extremely sinister to the eyes of that old retainer of feudalism, who shared to the full his master's present fears.

"Monsieur desires?" he asked, between respect and mistrust.

And then a crisp voice startled him.

"Why, Benoît! Name of a name! Have you completely forgotten me?"

With a shaking hand the old man raised the lantern he carried so as to throw its light more fully upon that lean, wide-mouthed countenance.

"Monsieur André!" he cried. "Monsieur André!" And then he looked at the sash and the cockade, and hesitated, apparently at a loss.

But André-Louis stepped past him into the wide vestibule, with its tessellated floor of black and white marble.

"If my godfather has not yet retired, take me to him. If he has retired, take me to him all the same."

"Oh, but certainly, M. André—and I am sure he will be ravished to see you. No, he has not yet retired. This way, M. André; this way, if you please."

The returning André-Louis, reaching Meudon a half-hour ago, had gone straight to the mayor for some definite news of what might be happening in Paris that should either confirm or dispel the ominous rumours that he had met in ever-increasing volume as he approached the capital. Rougane informed him that insurrection was imminent, that already the sections had possessed themselves of the barriers, and that it was impossible for any person not fully accredited to enter or leave the city.

André-Louis bowed his head, his thoughts of the gravest. He had for some time perceived the danger of this second revolution from within the first, which might destroy everything that had been done, and give the reins of power to a villainous faction that would plunge the country into anarchy. The thing he had feared was more than ever on the point of taking place. He would go on at once, that very night, and see for himself what was happening.

And then, as he was leaving, he turned again to Rougane to ask if M. de Kercadiou was still at Meudon.

"You know him, monsieur?"

"He is my godfather."

"Your godfather! And you a representative! Why, then, you may be the very man he needs"; and Rougane told him of his son's errand into Paris that afternoon and its result.

No more was required. That two years ago his godfather should upon certain terms have refused him his house weighed for nothing at the moment. He left his travelling carriage at the little inn, and went straight to M. de Kercadiou.

And M. de Kercadiou, startled in such an hour by this sudden apparition of one against whom he nursed a bitter grievance, greeted him in terms almost identical with those in which in that same room he had greeted him on a similar occasion once before.

"What do you want here, sir?"

"To serve you, if possible, my godfather," was the disarming answer.

But it did not disarm M. de Kercadiou. "You have stayed away so long, that I hoped you would not again disturb me."

"I should not have ventured to disobey you now were it not for the hope that I can be of service. I have seen Rougane, the mayor . . ."

"What's that you say about not venturing to disobey?"

"You forbade me your house, monsieur."

M. de Kercadiou stared at him helplessly.

"And that is why you have not come near me in all this time?"

"Of course. Why else?"

M. de Kercadiou continued to stare. Then he swore under his breath. It disconcerted him to have to deal with a man who insisted upon taking him so literally. He had expected that André-Louis would have come back contritely to admit his fault and beg to be taken back into favour. He said so.

"But how could I hope that you meant less than you said, monsieur? You were so very definite in your declaration. What expressions of contrition could have served me without a purpose of amendment? And I had no notion of amending. We may yet be thankful for that."

"Thankful?"

"I am a representative. I have certain powers. I am very opportunely returning to Paris. Can I serve you where Rougane cannot? The need, monsieur, would appear to be very urgent if the half of what I suspect is true. Aline should be placed in safety at once."

M. de Kercadiou surrendered unconditionally. He came over and took André-Louis's hand.

"My boy," he said, and he was visibly moved, "there is in you a certain nobility that is not to be denied. If I seemed harsh with you then, it was because I was fighting against your evil proclivities. I desire to keep you out of the evil path of politics that have brought this unfortunate country into so terrible a pass. The enemy on the frontier; civil war about to flame out at home. That is what you revolutionaries have done."

André-Louis did not argue. He passed on.

"About Aline?" he asked. And himself answered his own question. "She is in Paris, and she must be brought out of it at once, before the place becomes a shambles, as well it may once the passions that have been brewing all these months are let loose. Young Rougane's plan is good. At least, I cannot think of a better one."

"But Rougane the elder will not hear of it."

"You mean he will not do it on his own responsibility. But he has consented to do it on mine. I have left him a note over my signature to the effect that a safe-conduct for Mademoiselle de Kercadiou to go to Paris and return is issued by him in compliance with orders from me. The powers I carry and of which I have satisfied him are sufficient justification for obeying me in this. I have left him a note on the understanding that he is to use it only in an extreme case, for his own protection. In exchange he has given me this safe-conduct."

" You already have it ? "

M. de Kercadiou took the sheet of paper that André-Louis held out. His hand shook. He approached it to the cluster of candles burning on a console, and screwed up his short-sighted eyes to read.

" If you send that to Paris by young Rougane in the morning," said André-Louis, " Aline should be here by noon. Nothing of course could be done to-night without provoking suspicion. The hour is too late. And now, monsieur my godfather, you know exactly why I intrude in violation of your commands. If there is any other way in which I can serve you, you have but to name it whilst I am here."

" But there is, André. Did not Rougane tell you that there were others . . . ? "

" He mentioned Madame de Plougastel and her servant."

" Then why . . . ? " M. de Kercadiou broke off, looking his question.

Very solemnly André-Louis shook his head.

" That is impossible," he said.

M. de Kercadiou's mouth fell open in astonishment. " Impossible ? " he repeated. " But why ? "

" Monsieur, I can do what I am doing for Aline without offending my conscience. Besides, for Aline I would offend my conscience and do it. But Madame de Plougastel is in very different case. Neither Aline nor any of hers have been concerned in counter-revolutionary work which is the true source of the calamity that now threatens to overtake us. I can procure her removal from Paris without self-reproach, convinced that I am doing nothing that anyone could censure or that might become the subject of enquiries. But Madame de Plougastel is the wife of M. le Comte de Plougastel, whom all the world knows to be an agent between the Court and the émigrés."

" That is no fault of hers," cried M. de Kercadiou through his consternation.

" Agreed. But she may be called upon at any moment to establish the fact that she is not a party to these manœuvres. It is known that she was in Paris to-day. Should she be sought to-morrow, and should it be found that she has gone, inquiries will certainly be made, from which it must result that I have betrayed my trust and abused my powers to serve personal ends. I hope, monsieur, you will understand that the risk is too great to be run for the sake of a stranger."

" A stranger ? " said the seigneur, reproachfully.

" Practically a stranger to me," said André-Louis.

" But she is not a stranger to me, André. She is my cousin

and very dear and valued friend. And, *mon Dieu*, what you say but increases the urgency of getting her out of Paris. She must be rescued, André—at all costs she must be rescued. Why, her case is infinitely more urgent than Aline's!"

He stood, suppliant, before his godson, very different now from the stern man who had greeted him on his arrival. His face was pale, his hands shook, and there were beads of perspiration on his brow.

"Monsieur my godfather, I would do anything in reason. But I cannot do this. To rescue her might mean ruin for Aline and yourself as well as for me."

"We must take the risk."

"You have a right to speak for yourself, of course."

"Oh, and for you, believe me, André; for you!" He came close to the young man. "André, I implore you to take my word for that, and to obtain this permit for Madame de Plougastel."

André looked at him mystified. "This is fantastic," he said. "I have grateful memories of the lady's interest in me for a few days once when I was a child and again more recently in Paris when she sought to convert me to what she accounts the true political religion. But I do not risk my neck for her—no, nor yours, nor Aline's."

"Ah! But André . . ."

"That is my last word, monsieur. It is growing late, and I desire to sleep in Paris."

"No, no! Wait!" The Lord of Gavrillac was displaying signs of unspeakable distress. "André, you must!"

There was in this insistence, and, still more, in the frenzied manner of it, something so unreasonable, that André could not fail to assume that some dark and mysterious motive lay behind it.

"I must?" he echoed. "Why must I? Your reasons monsieur?"

"André, my reasons are overwhelming."

"Pray allow me to be the judge of that." André-Louis's manner was almost peremptory.

The demand seemed to reduce M. de Kercadiou to despair. He paced the room, his hands tight-clasped behind him, his brow wrinkled. At last he came to stand before his godson.

"Can't you take my word for it that these reasons exist?" he cried, in anguish.

"In such a matter as this—a matter that may involve my neck? Oh, monsieur, is that reasonable?"

"I violate my word of honour, my oath, if I tell you." M. de Kercadiou swung away, wringing his hands, his condition visibly piteous; then turned again to André. "But in this extremity,

in this desperate extremity, and since you so ungenerously insist, I shall have to tell you. God help me, I have no choice. She will realise that when she knows. André, my boy . . .” He paused again, a man afraid. He set a hand on his godson’s shoulder, and to his increasing amazement André-Louis perceived that over those pale, short-sighted eyes there was a film of tears. “Madame de Plougastel is your mother.”

Followed, for a long moment, utter silence. This thing that he was told was not immediately understood. When understanding came at last André-Louis’s first impulse was to cry out. But he possessed himself, and played the stoic. He must ever be playing something. That was in his nature. And he was true to his nature even in this supreme moment. He continued silent until, obeying that queer histrionic instinct, he could trust himself to speak without emotion.

“I see,” he said at last, quite coolly.

His mind was sweeping back over the past. Swiftly he reviewed his memories of Madame de Plougastel, her singular if sporadic interest in him, the curious blend of affection and wistfulness which her manner towards him had always presented, and at last he understood so much that hitherto had intrigued him.

“I see,” he said again, and added now: “Of course, any but a fool would have guessed it long ago.”

It was M. de Kercadiou who cried out, M. de Kercadiou who recoiled as from a blow.

“My God, André, of what are you made? You can take such an announcement in this fashion?”

“And how would you have me take it? Should it surprise me to discover that I had a mother? After all, a mother is an indispensable necessity to getting one’s self born.”

He sat down abruptly, to conceal the too-revealing fact that his limbs were shaking. He pulled a handkerchief from his pocket to mop his brow, which had grown damp. And then, quite suddenly, he found himself weeping.

At the sight of those tears streaming silently down that face that had turned so pale, M. de Kercadiou came quickly across to him. He sat down beside him, and threw an arm affectionately over his shoulder.

“André, my poor lad,” he murmured. “I . . . I was fool enough to think you had no heart. You deceived me with your infernal pretence, and now I see . . . I see . . .” He was not sure what it was that he saw, or else he hesitated to express it.

“It is nothing, monsieur. I am tired out, and . . . and I

have a cold in the head." And then, finding the part beyond his power, he abruptly threw it up, utterly abandoned all pretence. "Why . . . why has there been all this mystery?" he asked. "Was it intended that I should never know?"

"It was, André. It . . . it had to be, for prudence' sake."

"But why? Complete your confidence, sir. Surely you cannot leave it there. Having told me so much, you must tell me all."

"The reason, my boy, is that you were born some three years after your mother's marriage with M. de Plougastel, some eighteen months after M. de Plougastel had been away with the Army, and some four months before his return to his wife. It is a matter that M. de Plougastel has never suspected, and for gravest family reasons must never suspect. That is why the utmost secrecy has been preserved. That is why none was ever allowed to know. Your mother came betimes into Brittany, and under an assumed name spent some months in the village of Moreau. It was while she was there that you were born."

André-Louis turned it over in his mind. He had dried his tears, and sat now rigid and collected.

"When you say that none was ever allowed to know, you are telling me of course that you, monsieur . . ."

"Oh, mon Dieu, no!" The denial came in a violent outburst. M. de Kercadiou sprang to his feet, propelled from André's side by the violence of his emotions. It was as if the very suggestion filled him with horror. "I was the only other one who knew. But it is not as you think, André. You cannot imagine that I should lie to you, that I should deny you if you were my son?"

"If you say that I am not, monsieur, that is sufficient."

"You are not. I was Thérèse's cousin and also, as she well knew, her truest friend. She knew that she could trust me; and it was to me she came for help in her extremity. Once, years before, I would have married her. But, of course, I am not the sort of man a woman could love. She trusted, however, to my love for her, and I have kept her trust."

"Then, who was my father?"

"I don't know. She never told me. It was her secret and I did not pry. It is not in my nature, André."

André-Louis got up and stood silently facing M. de Kercadiou.

"You believe me, André?"

"Naturally, monsieur: and I am sorry I am sorry that I am not your son."

M. de Kercadiou gripped his godson's hand convulsively and held it a moment with no word spoken. Then as they fell away from each other again

"And now, what will you do, André?" he asked. "Now that you know?"

André-Louis stood awhile considering, then he began to laugh. The situation had its humours. He explained them.

"What difference should the knowledge make? Is filial piety to be called into existence by the mere announcement of relationship? Am I to risk my neck through lack of circumspection on behalf of a mother so very circumspect that she had no intention of ever revealing herself? The discovery rests upon the merest chance, upon a fall of the dice of Fate. Is that to weigh with me?"

"The decision is with you, André."

"Nay, it is beyond me. Decide it who can. I cannot."

"You mean that you refuse even now?"

"I mean that I consent. Since I cannot decide what it is that I should do, it only remains for me to do what a son should. It is grotesque; but all life is grotesque."

"You will never, never regret it."

"I hope not," said André. "Yet I think it very likely that I shall. And now I had better see Rougane again at once, and obtain from him the other two permits required. Then perhaps it will be best that I take them to Paris myself in the morning. If you will give me a bed, monsieur, I shall be grateful. I . . . I confess that I am hardly in case to do more to-night."

CHAPTER XV

SANCTUARY

INTO the late afternoon of that endless day of horror, with its perpetual alarms, its volleying musketry, rolling drums, and distant muttering of angry multitudes, Madame de Plougastel and Aline sat waiting in that handsome house in the Rue du Paradis. It was no longer for Rougane they waited. They realised that, be the reason what it might—and by now many reasons must no doubt exist—this friendly messenger would not return. They waited without knowing for what. They awaited for whatever might betide. At one time early in the afternoon the roar of battle approached them, racing swiftly in their direction, swelling each moment in volume and in horror. It was the frenzied clamour of a multitude drunk with blood and bent on destruction. Near at hand that fierce wave of humanity

checked in its turbulent progress. Followed blows of pikes upon a door and imperious calls to open, and thereafter came the rending of timbers, the shivering of glass, screams of terror blending with screams of rage, and, running through these shrill sounds, the deeper diapason of bestial laughter.

It was a hunt of two wretched Swiss Guardsmen seeking blindly to escape. And they were run to earth in a house in the neighbourhood, and there cruelly done to death by that demoniac mob. The thing accomplished, the hunters, male and female, forming into a battalion, came swinging down the Rue du Paradis, chanting the song of Marseilles—a song new to Paris in those days:

“ Allons, enfants de la patrie !
Le jour de gloire est arrivé.
Contre nous de la tyrannie
L'étendard sanglant est levé ”

Nearer it came, bawled by some hundred raucous voices, a dread sound that had come so suddenly to displace at least temporarily the merry, trivial air of the *Çaria* ! which hitherto had been the revolutionary carillon.

Instinctively Madame de Plougastel and Aline clung to each other. They had heard the sound of the ravishing of that other house in the neighbourhood, without knowledge of the reason. What if now it should be the turn of the Hôtel Plougastel ! There was no real cause to fear it, save that amid a turmoil imperfectly understood, and therefore the more awe-inspiring, the worst must be feared always.

The dreadful song, so dreadfully sung, and the thunder of heavily-shod feet upon the roughly-paved street, passed on and receded. They breathed again, almost as if a miracle had saved them, to yield to fresh alarm an instant later, when Madame's young footman, Jacques, the most trusted of her servants, burst into their presence unceremoniously with a scared face, bringing the announcement that a man who had just climbed over the garden wall professed himself a friend of Madame's, and desired to be brought immediately to her presence.

“ But he looks like a sansculotte, madame,” the staunch fellow warned her.

Her thoughts and hopes leapt at once to Rougane.

“ Bring him in,” she commanded, breathlessly.

Jacques went out, to return presently accompanied by a tall man in a long, shabby and very ample overcoat and a wide-brimmed hat that was turned down all round and adorned by an enormous tricolour cockade. This hat he removed as he entered

Jacques, standing behind him, perceived that his hair, although now in some disorder, bore signs of having been carefully dressed. It was clubbed, and it carried some lingering vestiges of powder. The young footman wondered what it was in the man's face which was turned from him, that should cause his mistress to cry out and recoil. Then he found himself dismissed abruptly by a gesture.

The newcomer advanced to the middle of the salon, moving like a man exhausted and breathing hard. There he leaned against a table, across which he confronted Madame de Plougastel. And she stood regarding him, a strange horror in her eyes.

In the background, on a settle at the salon's far end, sat Aline, staring in bewilderment and some fear at a face which if unrecognisable through the mask of blood and dust that smeared it, was yet familiar. And then the man spoke, and instantly she knew the voice for that of the Marquis de La Tour d'Azyr.

"My dear friend," he was saying, "forgive me if I startled you. Forgive me if I thrust myself in here without leave, at such a time, in such a manner. But . . . you see how it is with me. I am a fugitive. In the course of my distracted flight, not knowing which way to turn for safety, I thought of you. I told myself that if I could but safely reach your house, I might find sanctuary."

"You are in danger?"

"In danger!" Almost he seemed silently to laugh at the unnecessary question. "If I were to show myself openly in the streets just now, I might with luck contrive to live for five minutes! My friend, it has been a massacre. Some few of us escaped from the Tuileries at the end, to be hunted to death in the streets. I doubt if by this time a single Swiss survives. They had the worst of it, poor devils. And as for us—my God! They hate us more than they hate the Swiss. Hence this filthy disguise."

He peeled off the shaggy great-coat, and casting it from him stepped forth in the black satin that had been the general livery of the hundred knights of the dagger who had rallied in the Tuileries that morning to the defence of their King.

His coat was rent across the back, his neckcloth and the ruffles at his wrist were torn and bloodstained; with his smeared face and disordered head-dress, he was terrible to behold. Yet he contrived to carry himself with his habitual easy assurance remembered to kiss the trembling hand which Madame de Plougastel extended to him in welcome.

"You did well to come to me, Gervais," she said. "Yes, here is sanctuary for the present. You will be quite safe, at

least for as long as we are safe. My servants are entirely trustworthy. Sit down and tell me all."

He obeyed her, collapsing almost into the armchair which she thrust forward, a man exhausted, whether by physical exertion or by nerve-strain, or both. He drew a handkerchief from his pocket and wiped some of the blood and grime from his face.

"It is soon told." His tone was bitter with the bitterness of despair. "This, my dear, is the end of us. Plougastel is lucky in being across the frontier at such a time. But then, Plougastel was lucky always. Had I not been fool enough to trust those who to-day have proved themselves utterly unworthy of trust, that is where I should be myself. My remaining in Paris is the crowning folly of a life full of follies and mistakes. That I should come to you in my hour of most urgent need adds point to it." He laughed in his bitterness.

Madame moistened her dry lips. "And . . . and now?" she asked him.

"It only remains to get away as soon as may be, if it is still possible. Here in France there is no longer any room for us—at least, not above ground. To-day has proved it." And then he looked up at her, standing there beside him so pale and timid, and he smiled. He patted the fine hand that rested upon the arm of his chair. "My dear Thérèse, unless you carry charitableness to the length of giving me to drink, you will see me perish of thirst under your eyes before ever the canaille has a chance to finish me."

She started. "I should have thought of it," she cried in self-reproach, and she turned quickly. "Aline," she begged, "tell Jacques to bring . . ."

"Aline!" he echoed, interrupting, and swinging round in his turn. Then, as Aline rose into view, detaching from her background, and he at last perceived her, he heaved himself abruptly to his weary legs again, and stood there stiffly bowing to her across the space of gleaming floor. "Mademoiselle, I had not suspected your presence," he said, and he seemed extraordinarily ill at ease, a man startled, as if caught in an illicit act.

"I perceived it, monsieur," she answered, as she advanced to do Madame's commission. She paused before him. "From my heart, monsieur, I grieve that we should meet again in circumstances so very painful."

Not since the day of his duel with André-Louis—the day which had seen the death and burial of his last hope of winning her—had they stood face to face.

He checked as if on the point of answering her. His glance strayed to Madame de Plougastel, and, oddly reticent for one who could be very glib, he bowed in silence.

"But sit, monsieur, I beg. You are fatigued."

"You are gracious to observe it. With your permission, then." And he resumed his seat. She continued on her way to the door, and passed out upon her errand.

When presently she returned they had almost unaccountably changed places. It was Madame de Plougastel who was seated in that armchair of brocade and gilt, and M. de La Tour d'Azyr, who, despite his lassitude, was leaning over the back of it, talking earnestly, seeming by his attitude to plead with her. On Aline's entrance, he broke off instantly and moved away, so that she was left with a sense of having intruded. Further, she observed that the Countess was in tears.

Following her came presently the diligent Jacques bearing a tray laden with food and wine. Madame poured for her guest, and he drank a long draught of the Burgundy, then begged, holding forth his grimy hands, that he might mend his appearance before sitting down to eat.

He was led away and valeted by Jacques, and when he returned he had removed from his person the last vestige of the rough handling he had received. He looked almost his normal self, the disorder in his attire repaired, calm and dignified and courtly in his bearing, but very pale and haggard of face, seeming suddenly to have increased in years, to have reached in appearance the age that was in fact his own.

As he ate and drank—and this with appetite, for, as he told them, he had not tasted food since early morning—he entered into the details of the dreadful events of the day, and gave them the particulars of his own escape from the Tuileries when all was seen to be lost, and when the Swiss, having burnt their last cartridges, were submitting to wholesale massacre at the hands of the indescribably furious mob.

"Oh, it was all most ill done," he ended, critically. "We were timid when we should have been resolute, and resolute at last when it was too late. That is the history of our side from the beginning of this accursed struggle. We have lacked proper leadership throughout, and now—as I have said already—there is an end to us. It but remains to escape, as soon as we can discover how the thing is to be accomplished."

Madame told him of the hopes that she had centred upon Rougane.

It lifted him out of his gloom. He was disposed to be optimistic.

"You are wrong to have abandoned that hope," he assured her. "If this mayor is so well-disposed, he certainly can do as his son promised. But last night it would have been too late for him to have reached you, and to-day, assuming that he had come to Paris, almost impossible for him to win across the streets from the other side. It is most likely that he will yet come. I pray that he may; for the knowledge that you and Mademoiselle de Kercadiou are out of this would comfort me above all."

"We should take you with us," said Madame.

"Ah! But how?"

"Young Rougane was to bring me permits for three persons—Aline, myself, and my footman Jacques. You would take the place of Jacques."

"Faith, to get out of Paris, madame, there is no man whose place I would not take." And he laughed.

Their spirits rose with his, and their flagging hopes revived. But as dusk again descended upon the city, without any sign of the deliverer they awaited, those hopes began to ebb once more.

M. de La Tour d'Azyr at last pleaded weariness, and begged to be permitted to withdraw that he might endeavour to take some rest against whatever might have to be faced in the immediate future. When he had gone, Madame persuaded Aline to go and lie down.

"I will call you, my dear, the moment he arrives," she said, bravely maintaining that pretence of a confidence that had by now entirely evaporated.

Aline kissed her affectionately and departed, outwardly so calm and unperturbed as to leave the Countess wondering whether she realised the peril by which they were surrounded, a peril infinitely increased by the presence in that house of a man so widely known, and detested, as M. de La Tour d'Azyr, a man who was probably being sought for by his enemies at this moment.

Left alone, Madame lay down on a couch in the salon itself, to be ready for any emergency. It was a hot summer night, and the glass doors opening upon the luxuriant garden stood wide to admit the air. On that air came intermittently from the distance sounds of the populace's continuing horrible activities, the aftermath of that bloody day.

Madame de Plougastel lay there, listening to those sounds for upwards of an hour, thanking Heaven that for the present at least the disturbances were distant, dreading lest at any moment they should occur nearer at hand, lest this Bondy section in which her hotel was situated should become the scene of horrors similar to those whose echoes reached her ears from other sections away to the south and west.

The couch occupied by the Countess lay in shadow ; for all the lights in that long salon had been extinguished with the exception of a cluster of candles in a massive silver candle-branch placed on a round marquetry table in the middle of the room—an island of light in the surrounding gloom.

The time-piece on the overmantel chimed melodiously the hour of ten, and then, startling in the suddenness with which it broke the immediate silence, another sound vibrated through the house, and brought Madame to her feet in a breathless mingling of hope and dread. Someone was knocking sharply on the door below. Followed moments of agonised suspense, culminating in the abrupt invasion of the room by the footman, Jacques. He looked round, not seeing his mistress at first.

"Madame ! Madame !" he panted, out of breath.

"What is it, Jacques ?" Her voice was steady now that the need for self-control seemed thrust upon her. She advanced from the shadows into that island of light about the table.

"There is a man below. He is asking . . . he is demanding to see you at once."

"A man ?" she questioned.

"He . . . he seems to be an official ; at least, he wears the sash of office. And he refuses to give any name ; he says that his name would convey nothing to you. He insists that he must see you in person and at once."

"An official ?" said Madame.

"An official," Jacques repeated. "I would not have admitted him, but that he demanded it in the name of the nation. Madame, it is for you to say what shall be done. Robert is with me. If you wish it . . . whatever it may be. . . ."

"My good Jacques, no, no." She was perfectly composed. "If this man intended evil, surely he would not come alone. Conduct him to me, and then beg Mademoiselle de Kercadiou to join me if she is awake."

Jacques departed, himself partly reassured. Madame seated herself in the armchair by the table well within the light. She smoothed her dress with a mechanical hand. If, as it would seem, her hopes had been futile, so had her momentary fears. A man on any but an errand of peace would have brought some following with him, as she had said.

The door opened again and Jacques re-appeared ; after him, stepping briskly past him, came a slight man in a wide-brimmed hat adorned by a tricolour cockade. About the waist of an olive-green riding-coat he wore a broad tricolour sash ; a sword swung at his side.

He swept off his hat, and the candle-light glinted on the steel

buckle in front of it. Madame found herself silently regarded by a pair of large dark eyes set in a lean brown face, eyes that were most singularly intent and searching.

She leaned forward, incredulity swept across her countenance. Then her eyes kindled, and the colour came creeping back into her pale cheeks. She rose suddenly. She was trembling.

"André-Louis!" she exclaimed.

CHAPTER XVI

THE BARRIER

THAT gift of laughter of his seemed utterly extinguished. For once there was no gleam of humour in those dark eyes, as they continued to consider her with that queer stare of scrutiny. And yet though his gaze was sombre, his thoughts were not. With his cruelly true mental vision which pierced through shams, and his capacity for detached observation—which properly applied might have carried him very far indeed—he perceived the grotesqueness, the artificiality of the emotion which in that moment he experienced, but by which he refused to be possessed. It sprang entirely from the consciousness that she was his mother; as if, all things considered, the more or less accidental fact that she had brought him into the world could establish between them any real bond at this time of day. The motherhood that bears and forsakes is less than animal. He had considered this; he had been given ample leisure in which to consider it during those long turbulent hours in which he had been forced to wait, because it would have been almost impossible to have won across that seething city, and certainly unwise to have attempted so to do.

He had reached the conclusion that by consenting to go to her rescue at such a time he stood committed to a piece of purely sentimental quixotry. The quittances which the Mayor of Meudon had exacted from him before he would issue the necessary safe-conducts placed the whole of his future, perhaps his very life, in jeopardy. And he had consented to do this not for the sake of a reality, but out of regard for an idea—he who all his life had avoided the false lure of worthless and hollow sentimentality.

Thus thought André-Louis as he considered her now so searchingly, finding it, naturally enough, a matter of extraordinary interest to look consciously upon his mother for the first time at the age of eight-and-twenty

From her he looked at last at Jacques, who remained at attention, waiting by the open door.

"Could we be alone, madame?" he asked her.

She waved the footman away and the door closed. In agitated silence, unquestioning, she waited for him to account for his presence there at so extraordinary a time.

"Rougane could not return," he informed her shortly. "At M. de Kercadiou's request, I come instead."

"You! You are sent to rescue us!" The note of amazement in her voice was stronger than that of her relief.

"That, and to make your acquaintance, madame."

"To make my acquaintance? But what do you mean, André-Louis?"

"This letter from M. de Kercadiou will tell you."

Intrigued by his odd words and odder manner, she took the folded sheet. She broke the seal with shaking hands, and with shaking hands approached the written page to the light. Her eyes grew troubled as she read; the shaking of her hands increased and midway through that reading a moan escaped her. One glance that was almost of terror she darted at the slim, straight man standing so incredibly impassive upon the edge of the light and then she endeavoured to read on. But the crabbed characters of M. de Kercadiou swam distortedly under her eyes. She could not read. Besides, what could it matter what else he said? She had read enough. The sheet fluttered from her hands to the table, and out of a face that was like a face of wax she looked now with a wistfulness, a sadness indescribable, at André-Louis.

"And so you know, my child?" His voice was stifled to a whisper.

"I know, madame my mother."

The grimness, the subtle blend of merciless derision and reproach in which it was uttered, completely escaped her. She cried out at the new name. For her in that moment time and the world stood still. Her peril there in Paris as the wife of an intriguer at Coblenz was blotted out, together with every other consideration—thrust out of a consciousness that could find room for nothing else beside the fact that she stood acknowledged by her only son, this child begotten in adultery, born furtively and in shame in a remote Brittany village eight-and-twenty years ago. Not even a thought for the betrayal of that inviolable secret, or the consequences that might follow could she spare in this supreme moment.

She took one or two faltering steps towards him, hesitating. Then she opened her arms. Sobs suffocated her voice.

"Won't you come to me, André-Louis?"

A moment yet he stood hesitating, startled by that appeal, angered almost by his heart's response to it, reason and sentiment at grips in his soul. This was not real, his reason postulated; this poignant emotion that she displayed and that he experienced was fantastic. Yet he went. Her arms enfolded him; her wet cheek was pressed hard against his own; her frame which the years had not yet succeeded in robbing of its grace, was shaken by the passionate storm within her.

"Oh, André-Louis, my child, if you knew how I have hungered to hold you so! If you knew how in denying myself this I have atoned and suffered! Kercadiou should not have told you—not even now. It was wrong—most wrong perhaps to you. It would have been better that he should have left me here to my fate, whatever that may be. And yet—come what may of this—to be able to hold you so, to be able to acknowledge you, to hear you call me mother—Oh, André-Louis, I cannot now regret it. I cannot . . . I cannot wish it otherwise."

"Is there any need, madame?" he asked her, his stoicism deeply shaken. "There is no occasion to take others into our confidence. This is for to-night alone. To-night we are mother and son. To-morrow we resume our former places, and, outwardly at least, forget."

"Forget? Have you no heart, André-Louis?"

The question recalled him curiously to his attitude towards life—that histrionic attitude of his that he accounted true philosophy. Also he remembered what lay before them; and he realised that he must master not only himself but her; that to yield too far to sentiment at such a time might be the ruin of them all.

"It is a question propounded to me so often that it must contain the truth," said he. "My rearing is to blame for that."

She tightened her clutch about his neck even as he would have attempted to disengage himself from her embrace.

"You do not blame me for your rearing? Knowing all, as you do, André-Louis, you cannot altogether blame. You must be merciful to me. You must forgive me. You must! I had no choice."

"When we know all of whatever it may be, we can never do anything but forgive, madame. That is the profoundest religious truth that was ever written. It contains, in fact, a whole religion—the noblest religion any man could have to guide him. I say this for your comfort, madame my mother."

She sprang away from him with a startled cry. Beyond him in the shadows by the door a pale figure shimmered ghostly. It

advanced into the light, and resolved itself into Aline. She had come in answer to that forgotten summons Madame had sent her by Jacques. Entering unperceived, she had seen André-Louis in the embrace of the woman whom he addressed as "Mother." She had recognised him instantly by his voice. And she could not have said what bewildered her more : his presence there, or the thing she overheard.

"You heard, Aline?" Madame exclaimed.

"I could not help it, madame. You sent for me. I am sorry if . . ." She broke off, and looked at André-Louis long and curiously. She was pale, but quite composed. She held out her hand to him. "And so you have come at last, André," said she "You might have come before."

"I come when I am wanted," was his answer, "which is the only time in which one can be sure of being received." He said it without bitterness, and having said it stooped to kiss her hand.

"You can forgive me what is past, I hope, since I failed of my purpose," he said, gently, half-pleading. "I could not have come to you pretending that the failure was intentional—a compromise between the necessities of the case and your own wishes. For it was not that. And yet, you do not seem to have profited by my failure. You are still a maid."

She turned her shoulder to him.

"There are things," she said "that you will never understand."

"Life, for one," he acknowledged. "I confess that I am finding it bewildering. The very explanations calculated to simplify it seem but to complicate it further." And he looked at Madame de Plougastel.

"You mean something, I suppose," said Mademoiselle.

"Aline!" It was the Countess who spoke. She knew the danger of half-discoveries. "I can trust you, child, I know and André-Louis I am sure will offer no objection." She had taken up the letter to show it to Aline. Yet first her eyes questioned him.

"Oh, none, madame," he assured her. "It is entirely a matter for yourself."

Aline looked from one to the other with troubled eyes, hesitating to take the letter that was now proffered. When she had read it through, she very thoughtfully replaced it on the table. A moment she stood there with bowed head, the other two watching her. Then impulsively she ran to Madame and put her arms about her.

"Aline!" It was a cry of wonder, almost of joy. "You do not utterly abhor me!"

'My dear,' said Aline, and kissed the tear-stained face that seemed to have grown years older in those last few hours.

In the background, André-Louis, steeling himself against emotionalism, spoke with the voice of Scaramouche.

"It would be well, mesdames, to postpone all transports until they can be indulged at greater leisure and in more security. It is growing late. If we are to get out of this shambles we should be wise to take the road without more delay."

It was a tonic as effective as it was necessary. It startled them into remembrance of their circumstances, and under the spur of it they went at once to make their preparations.

They left him for perhaps a quarter of an hour, to pace that long room alone, saved only from impatience by the turmoil of his mind. When at length they returned, they were accompanied by a tall man in a full-skirted shaggy greatcoat and a broad hat the brim of which was turned down all round. He remained respectfully by the door in the shadows.

Between them the two women had concerted it thus, or, rather, the Countess had so concerted it when Aline had warned her that André-Louis's bitter hostility towards the Marquis made it unthinkable that he should move a finger consciously to save him.

Now despite the close friendship uniting M. de Kercadiou and his niece with Madame de Plougastel, there were several matters concerning them of which the Countess was in ignorance. One of these was the project at one time existing of a marriage between Aline and M. de La Tour d'Azyr. It was a matter that Aline—naturally enough in the state of her feelings—had never mentioned, nor had M. de Kercadiou ever alluded to it since his coming to Meudon, by when he had perceived how unlikely it was ever to be realised.

M. de La Tour d'Azyr's concern for Aline on that morning of the duel when he had found her half-swooning in Madame de Plougastel's carriage had been of a circumspection that betrayed nothing of his real interest in her, and therefore had appeared no more than natural in one who must account himself the cause of her distress. Similarly Madame de Plougastel had never realised nor did she realise now—for Aline did not trouble fully to enlighten her—that the hostility between the two men was other than political, the quarrel other than that which already had taken André-Louis to the Bois on every day of the preceding week. But, at least, she realised that even if André-Louis's rancour could have no other source, yet that inconclusive duel was enough for Aline's fears.

And so she had proposed this obvious deception; and Aline

had consented to be a passive party to it. They had made the mistake of not fully forewarning and persuading M. de La Tour d'Azyr. They had trusted entirely to his anxiety to escape from Paris to keep him rigidly within the part imposed upon him. They had reckoned without the queer sense of honour that moved such men as M. le Marquis, nurtured upon a code of shams.

André-Louis, turning to scan that muffled figure, advanced from the dark depths of the salon. As the light beat on his white, lean face the pseudo-footman started. The next moment he too stepped forward into the light, and swept his broad-brimmed hat from his brow. As he did so, André-Louis observed that his hand was fine and white and that a jewel flashed from one of the fingers. Then he caught his breath and stiffened in every line as he recognised the face revealed to him.

"Monsieur," that stern, proud man was saying, "I cannot take advantage of your ignorance. If these ladies can persuade you to save me, at least it is due to you that you shall know whom you are saving."

He stood there by the table very erect and dignified, ready to perish as he had lived—if perish he must—without fear and without deception.

André-Louis came slowly forward until he reached the table on the other side, and then at last the muscles of his set face relaxed, and he laughed.

"You laugh?" said M. de La Tour d'Azyr, frowning, offended.

"It is so damnably amusing," said André-Louis.

"You've an odd sense of humour, M. Moreau."

"Oh, admitted. The unexpected always moved me so. I have found you many things in the course of our acquaintance. To-night you are the one thing I never expected to find you; an honest man."

M. de La Tour d'Azyr quivered. But he attempted no reply.

"Because of that, monsieur, I am disposed to be clement. It is probably a foolishness. But you have surprised me into it. I give you three minutes in which to leave this house, and to take your own measures for your safety. What afterwards happens to you shall be no concern of mine."

"Ah, no, André! Listen . . ." Madame began in anguish.

"Pardon, madame. It is the utmost that I will do, and already I am violating what I conceive to be my duty. If M. de La Tour d'Azyr remains he not only ruins himself but he imperils you. For unless he departs at once, he goes with me to the headquarters of the section, and the sect on will have his head on a pike inside the hour. He is a notorious counter-revolutionary, a knight of the dagger, one of those whom an exasperated populace

is determined to exterminate. Now, monsieur, you know what awaits you. Resolve yourself, and at once, for these ladies' sake."

"But you don't know André-Louis!" Madame de Plougastel's condition was one of anguish indescribable. She came to him, and clutched his arm. "For the love of Heaven André-Louis be merciful with him. You must!"

"But that is what I am being, madame—merciful. more merciful than he deserves. And he knows it. Fate has meddled most oddly in our concerns to bring us together to-night. Almost it is as if Fate were forcing retribution at last upon him. Yet, for your sakes, I take no advantage of it, provided that he does at once as I have desired him."

And now from beyond the table the Marquis spoke icily, and as he spoke his right hand stirred under the ample folds of his greatcoat.

"I am glad, M. Moreau, that you take that tone with me. You relieve me of the last scruple. You spoke of Fate just now, and I must agree with you that Fate has meddled oddly, though perhaps not to the end that you discern. For years now you have chosen to stand in my path and thwart me at every turn, holding over me a perpetual menace. Persistently you have sought my life in various ways first indirectly and at last directly. Your intervention in my affairs has ruined my highest hopes—more effectively perhaps than you suppose. Throughout you have been my evil genius. And you are even one of the agents of this climax of despair that has been reached by me to-night."

"Wait! Listen!" Madame was panting. She flung away from André-Louis, as if moved by some premonition of what was coming. "Gervais! This is horrible!"

"Horrible, perhaps, but inevitable. Himself he has invited it. I am a man in despair, the fugitive of a lost cause. That man holds the keys of escape. And besides, between him and me there is a reckoning to be paid."

His hand came from beneath the coat at last, and it came armed with a pistol.

Madame de Plougastel screamed and flung herself upon him. On her knees now she clung to his arm with all her strength and might.

Vainly he sought to shake himself free from that desperate clutch.

"Thérèse!" he cried. "Are you mad? Will you destroy me and yourself? This creature has the safe-conducts that mean our salvation. Himself, he is nothing."

From the background Aline, a breathless, horror-stricken

spectator of that scene, spoke sharply, her quick mind pointing out the line of checkmate.

"Burn the safe-conducts, André-Louis. Burn them a once—in the candles there."

But André-Louis had taken advantage of that moment of M. de La Tour d'Azyr's impotence to draw a pistol in his turn. "I think it will be better to burn his brains instead," he said. "Stand away from him, madame."

Far from obeying that imperious command, Madame de Plougastel rose to her feet to cover the Marquis with her body. But she still clung to his arm, clung to it with unsuspected strength that continued to prevent him from attempting to use the pistol.

"André! For God's sake, André!" she panted hoarsely over her shoulder.

"Stand away, madame," he commanded her again, more sternly, "and let this murderer take his due. He is jeopardising all our lives, and his own has been forfeit these years. Stand away!" He sprang forward with intent now to fire over her shoulder, and Aline moved too late to hinder him.

"André! André!"

Panting, gasping, haggard of face, on the verge almost of hysteria, the distracted Countess flung at last an effective, a terrible barrier between the hatred of those men, each intent upon taking the other's life.

"He is your father, André! Gervais, he is your son—our son. The letter there . . . on the table . . . Oh, my God!" And she slipped nervelessly to the ground, and crouched there sobbing at the feet of M. de La Tour d'Azyr.

CHAPTER XVII

SAFE-CONDUCT

ACROSS the body of that convulsively sobbing woman, the mother of one and the mistress of the other, the eyes of those mortal enemies met, invested with a startled, appalled interest that admitted of no words.

Beyond the table, as if turned to stone by this culminating horror of revelation, stood Aline.

M. de La Tour d'Azyr was the first to stir. Into his bewildered mind came the memory of something that Madame de

Plougastel had said of a letter that was on the table. He advanced unhindered. The announcement made, Madame de Plougastel no longer feared the sequel, and so she let him go. He walked unsteadily past this new-found son of his, and took up the sheet that lay beside the candle-branch. A long moment he stood reading it, none heeding him. Aline's eyes were all on André-Louis, full of wonder and commiseration, whilst André-Louis was staring down, in stupefied fascination at his mother.

M. de La Tour d'Azyr read the letter slowly through. Then very quietly he replaced it. His next concern, being the product of an artificial age, sternly schooled in the suppression of emotion was to compose himself. Then he stepped back to Madame de Plougastel's side and stooped to raise her.

"Thérèse," he said.

Obedying by instinct the implied command she made an effort to rise and to control herself in her turn. The Marquis half-conducted, half-carried her to the armchair by the table.

André-Louis looked on. Still numbed and bewildered, he made no attempt to assist. He saw as in a dream the Marquis bending over Madame de Plougastel. As in a dream he heard him ask :

"How long have you known this, Thérèse ? "

"I . . . I have always known it . . . always. I confided him to Kercadiou. I saw him once as a child . Oh, but what of that ? "

"Why was I never told ? Why did you deceive me ? Why did you tell me that this child had died a few days after birth ? Why, Thérèse ? Why ? "

"I was afraid. I . . . I thought it better so—that nobody, nobody, not even you, should know. And nobody has known save Quintin until last night, when to induce him to come here and save me he was forced to tell him."

"But I, Thérèse ? " the Marquis insisted. "It was my right to know."

"Your right ! What could you have done ? Acknowledge him ? And then ? Ha ! " It was a queer, desperate note of laughter. "There was Plougastel ; there was my family and there was you . . . you, yourself, who had ceased to care, in whom the fear of discovery had stifled love. Why should I have told you then ? Why ? I should not have told you now had there been any other way to . . . to save you both. Once before I suffered just such dreadful apprehensions when you and he fought in the Bois. I was on my way to prevent it when you met me. I would have divulged the truth as a

last resource, to avert that horror. But mercifully God spared me the necessity then."

It had not occurred to any of them to doubt her statement, incredible though it might seem. Had any done so her present words must have resolved all doubt, explaining as they did much that to each of her listeners had been obscure until this moment.

M. de La Tour d'Azyr, overcome, reeled away to a chair and sat down heavily. Losing command of himself for a moment, he took his haggard face in his hands.

Through the windows open to the garden came from the distance the faint throbbing of a drum to remind them of what was happening around them. But the sound went unheeded. To each it must have seemed that here they were face to face with a horror greater than any that might be tormenting Paris. At last André-Louis began to speak, his voice level and unutterably cold.

"M. de La Tour d'Azyr," he said, "I trust that you'll agree that this disclosure, which can hardly be more distasteful and horrible to you than it is to me, alters nothing, since it effaces nothing of all that lies between us. Or if it alters anything, it is merely to add something to that score. And yet . . . Oh, but what can it avail to talk? Here, monsieur, take this safe-conduct which is made out for Madame de Plougastel's footman, and with it make your escape as best you can. In return I will beg of you the favour never to allow me to see you or hear of you again."

"André!" His mother swung upon him with that cry, and yet again that question: "Have you no heart? What has he ever done to you that you should nurse so bitter a hatred of him?"

"You shall hear, madame. Once two years ago, in this very room, I told you of a man who had brutally killed my dearest friend and debauched the girl I was to have married. M. de La Tour d'Azyr is that man."

A moan was her only answer. She covered her face with her hands.

The Marquis rose slowly to his feet again. He came slowly forward, his smouldering eyes scanning his son's face.

"You are hard," he said, grimly. "But I recognise the hardness. It derives from the blood you bear."

"Spare me that," said André-Louis.

The Marquis inclined his head. "I will not mention it again. But I desire that you should at least understand me, and you too, Thérèse. You accuse me, sir, of murdering your dearest friend. I will admit that the means employed were perhaps unworthy.

But what other means were at my command to meet an urgency that every day since then proves to have existed ? M. de Vilmorin was a revolutionary, a man of new ideas that should overthrow society and rebuild it more akin to the desires of such as himself I belonged to the order that quite as justifiably desired society to remain as it was. Not only was it better so for me and mine, but I also contend, and you have yet to prove me wrong, that it is better so for all the world ; that, indeed, no other conceivable society is possible. Every human society must of necessity be composed of several strata. You may disturb it temporarily into an amorphous whole by a revolution such as this ; but only temporarily. Soon out of the chaos which is all that you and your kind can ever produce, order must be restored, or life will perish ; and with the restoration of order comes the restoration of the various strata necessary to organised society. Those that were yesterday at the top may in the new order of things find themselves dispossessed without any benefit to the whole. That change I resisted. The spirit of it I fought with whatever weapons were available, whenever and wherever I encountered it. M. de Vilmorin was an incendiary of the worst type. A man of eloquence full of false ideals that misled poor ignorant men into believing that the change proposed could make the world a better place for them. You are an intelligent man, and I defy you to answer me from your heart and conscience that such a thing was true or possible. You know that it is untrue ; you know that it is a pernicious doctrine ; and what made it worse on the lips of M. de Vilmorin was that he was sincere and eloquent. His voice was a danger that must be removed—silenced. So much was necessary in self-defence. In self-defence I did it. I had no grudge against M. de Vilmorin. He was a man of my own class ; a gentleman of pleasant ways, amiable, estimable, and able.

“ You conceive me slaying him for the very lust of slaying, like some beast of the jungle flinging itself upon its natural prey. That has been your error from the first. I did what I did with the very heaviest heart—oh, spare me your sneer ! I do not lie. I have never lied. And I swear to you here and now, by my every hope of heaven, that what I say is true. I loathed the thing I did. Yet for my own sake and the sake of my order I must do it. Ask yourself whether M. de Vilmorin would have hesitated for a moment if by procuring my death he could have brought the Utopia of his dreams a moment nearer realisation.

“ After that, you determined that the sweetest vengeance would be to frustrate my ends by reviving in yourself the voice that I had silenced, by yourself carrying forward the fantastic

apostleship of equality that was M. de Vilmorin's. You lacked the vision that would have shown you that God did not create men equals. Well, you are in case to-night to judge which of us was right, which wrong. You see what is happening here in Paris. You see the foul spectre of Anarchy stalking through a land fallen into confusion. Probably you have enough imagination to conceive something of what must follow. And do you deceive yourself that out of this filth and ruin there will rise up an ideal form of society? Don't you understand that society must re-order itself presently out of all this?

"But why say more? I must have said enough to make you understand the only thing that really matters—that I killed M. de Vilmorin as a matter of duty to my order. And the truth—which though it may offend you should also convince you—is that to-night I can look back on the deed with equanimity, without a single regret, apart from what lies between you and me.

"When, kneeling beside the body of your friend that day at Gavrilac, you insulted and provoked me, had I been the tiger you conceived me I must have killed you too. I am, as you may know, a man of quick passions. Yet I curbed the natural anger you aroused in me, because I could forgive an affront to myself where I could not overlook a calculated attack upon my order."

He paused a moment. André-Louis stood rigid, listening and wondering. So, too, the others. Then M. le Marquis resumed on a note of less assurance. "In the matter of Mademoiselle Binet I was unfortunate. I wronged you through inadvertence. I had no knowledge of the relations between you."

André-Louis interrupted him sharply at last with a question: "Would it have made a difference if you had?"

"No," he was answered, frankly. "I have the faults of my kind. I cannot pretend that any such scruple as you suggest would have weighed with me. But can you—if you are capable of any detached judgment—blame me very much for that?"

"All things considered, monsieur, I am rapidly being forced to the conclusion that it is impossible to blame any man for anything in this world; that we are all of us the sport of destiny. Consider, monsieur, this gathering—this family gathering—here to-night, whilst out there . . . Oh, my God, let us make an end. Let us go our ways and write 'finis' to this horrible chapter of our lives."

M. de La Tour d'Azyr considered him gravely sadly, in silence for a moment.

"Perhaps it is best," he said, at length, in a small voice. He turned to Madame de Plougastel. "If a wrong I have to

admit in my life, a wrong that I most bitterly regret, it is the wrong that I have done to you, my dear . . . ”

“Not now, Gervais! Not now!” she faltered, interrupting him.

“Now—for the first and the last time. I am going. It is not likely that we shall ever meet again—that I shall ever see any of you again—of you who should have been the nearest and dearest to me. We are all, he says, the sport of destiny. Ah, but not quite. Destiny is an intelligent force, moving with purpose. In life we pay for the evil that in life we do. That is the lesson that I have learnt to-night. By an act of betrayal I begot, unknown to me, a son who, whilst as ignorant as myself of our relationship, has come to be the evil genius of my life, to cross and thwart me, and finally to help to pull me down in ruin. It is just—poetically just. My full and resigned acceptance of that fact is the only atonement I can offer you.”

He stooped and took one of Madame’s hands that lay limply in her lap.

“Good-bye, Thérèse!” His voice broke. He had reached the end of his iron self-control.

She rose and clung to him a moment, unashamed before them. The ashes of that dead romance had been deeply stirred this night, and deep down some lingering embers had been found that glowed brightly now before their final extinction. Yet she made no attempt to detain him. She understood that their son had pointed out the only wise, the only possible, course, and was thankful that M. de La Tour d’Azyr accepted it.

“God keep you, Gervais,” she murmured. “You will take the safe-conduct, and . . . and you will let me know when you are safe?”

He held her face between his hands an instant; then very gently kissed her, and put her from him. Standing erect, and outwardly calm again, he looked across at André-Louis, who was proffering him a sheet of paper.

“It is the safe-conduct. Take it, monsieur. It is my first and last gift to you, and certainly the last gift I should ever have thought of making you—the gift of life. In a sense it makes us quits. The irony, sir, is not mine, but Fate’s. Take it, monsieur, and go in peace.”

M. de La Tour d’Azyr took it. His eyes looked hungrily into the lean face confronting him, so sternly set. He thrust the paper into his bosom, and then, abruptly, convulsively, held out his hand. His son’s eyes asked a question.

“Let there be peace between us, in God’s name,” said the Marquis thickly.

Pity stirred at last in André-Louis. Some of the sternness left his face. He sighed.

"Good-bye, monsieur," he said.

"You are hard," his father told him, speaking wistfully. "But perhaps you are in the right so to be. In other circumstances I should have been proud to have owned you as my son. As it is . . ." He broke off abruptly, and as abruptly added: "Good-bye."

He loosed his son's hand and stepped back. They bowed formally to each other. And then M. de La Tour d'Azyr bowed to Mademoiselle de Kercadiou in utter silence, a bow that contained something of utter renunciation, of finality.

That done, he turned and walked stiffly out of the room, and so out of all their lives. Months later they were to hear of him in the service of the Emperor of Austria.

CHAPTER XVIII

SUNRISE

ANDRÉ-LOUIS took the air next morning on the terrace at Meudon. The hour was very early, and the newly-risen sun was transmuting into diamonds the dewdrops that still lingered on the lawn. Down in the valley, five miles away, the morning mists were rising over Paris. Yet, early as it was, that house on the hill was astir already, in a bustle of preparation for the departure that was imminent.

André-Louis had won safely out of Paris last night with his mother and Aline, and to-day they were to set out, all of them, for Coblenz.

To André-Louis, sauntering there with hands clasped behind him and head hunched between his shoulders—for life had never been richer in material for reflection—came presently Aline through one of the glass doors from the library.

"You're early astir," she greeted him.

"Faith, yes. I haven't been to bed. No," he assured her, in answer to her exclamation. "I spent the night, or what was left of it, sitting at the window thinking."

"My poor André!"

"You describe me perfectly. I am very poor—for I know nothing, understand nothing. It is not a calamitous condition until it is realised. Then . . ." He threw out his arms, and

let them fall again. His face, she observed, was very drawn and haggard.

She paced with him along the old granite balustrade, over which the geraniums flung their mantle of green and scarlet.

"Have you decided what you are going to do?" she asked him.

"I have decided that I have no choice. I, too, must emigrate. I am lucky to be able to do so, lucky to have found no one amid yesterday's chaos in Paris to whom I could report myself as I foolishly desired, else I might no longer be armed with these." He drew from his pocket the powerful passport of the Commission of Twelve, enjoining upon all Frenchmen to lend him such assistance as he might require, and warning those who might think of hindering him that they did so at their own peril. He spread it before her. "With this I conduct you all safely to the frontier. Over the frontier M. de Kercadiou and Madame de Plougastel will have to conduct me; and then we shall be quits."

"Quits?" quoth she. "But you will be unable to return!"

"You conceive, of course, my eagerness to do so. My child, in a day or two there will be enquiries. It will be asked what has become of me. Things will transpire. Then the hunt will start. But by then we shall be well upon our way, well ahead of any possible pursuit. You don't imagine that I could ever give the government any satisfactory explanation of my absence—assuming that any government remains to which to explain it?"

"You mean . . . that you will sacrifice your future, this career upon which you have embarked?" It took her breath away.

"In the pass to which things have come, there is no career for me down there—at least, no honest one. And I hope you do not think that I could be dishonest. It is the day of the Dantons, and the Marats, the day of the rabble. The reins of government will be tossed to the populace, or else the populace, drunk with the conceit with which the Dantons and the Marats have filled it, will seize the reins by force. Chaos must follow, and a despotism of brutes and apes, a government of the whole by its lowest parts. It cannot endure, because unless a nation is ruled by its best elements it must wither and decay."

"I thought you were a republican," said she.

"Why, so I am. I am talking like one. I desire a society which selects its rulers from the best elements of every class and denies the right of any class or corporation to usurp the government to itself—whether it be the nobles, the clergy, the bourgeoisie, or the proletariat. For government by any one class is fatal to the welfare of the whole. Two years ago our ideal

seemed to have been realised. The monopoly of power had been taken from the class that had held it too long and too unjustly by the hollow right of heredity. It had been distributed as evenly as might be throughout the State, and if men had only paused there, all would have been well. But our impetus carried us too far, the privileged orders goaded us on by their very opposition, and the result is the horror of which yesterday you saw no more than the beginnings. No, no," he ended. "Careers there may be for venal place-seekers, for opportunists ; but none for a man who desires to respect himself. It is time to go. I make no sacrifice in going."

"But where will you go? What will you do?"

"Oh, something. Consider that in four years I have been lawyer, politician, swordsman, and buffoon—especially the latter. There is always a place in the world for Scaramouche. Besides, do you know that, unlike Scaramouche, I have been oddly provident? I am the owner of a little farm in Saxony. I think that agriculture might suit me. It is a meditative occupation ; and when all is said, I am not a man of action. I haven't the qualities for the part."

She looked up into his face, and there was a wistful smile in her deep blue eyes.

"Is there any part for which you have not the qualities, I wonder?"

"Do you really? Yet you cannot say that I have made a success of any of those which I have played. I have always ended by running away. I am running away now from a thriving fencing academy, which is likely to become the property of Le Duc. That comes of having gone into politics, from which I am also running away. It is the one thing in which I really excel. That, too, is an attribute of Scaramouche."

"Why will you always be deriding yourself?" she wondered.

"Because I recognise myself for part of this mad world, I suppose. You wouldn't have me take it seriously? I should lose my reason utterly if I did ; especially since discovering my parents."

"Don't, André!" she begged him. "You are insincere, you know."

"Of course I am. Do you expect sincerity in man when hypocrisy is the very keynote of human nature? We are nurtured on it ; we are schooled in it ; we live by it ; and we rarely realise it. You have seen it rampant and out of hand in France during the past four years—cant and hypocrisy on the lips of the revolutionaries, cant and hypocrisy on the lips of the upholders of the old régime ; a riot of hypocrisy out of which in

the end is begotten chaos. And I who criticise it all on this beautiful God-given morning am the rankest and most contemptible hypocrite of all. It was this—the realisation of this truth—kept me awake all night. For two years I have persecuted by every means in my power . . . M. de La Tour d'Azyr."

He paused before uttering the name, paused as if hesitating how to speak of him.

"And in those two years I have deceived myself as to the motive that was spurring me. He spoke of me last night as the evil genius of his life, and himself he recognised the justice of this. It may be that he was right, and because of that it is probable that even had he not killed Philippe de Vilmorin, things would still have been the same. Indeed, to-day I know that they must have been. That is why I call myself a hypocrite, a poor self-duping hypocrite."

"But why, André?"

He stood still and looked at her. "Because he sought you, Aline. Because in that alone he must have found me ranged against him, utterly intransigent. Because of that, I must have strained every nerve to bring him down—so as to save you from becoming the prey of your own ambition.

"I wish to speak of him no more than I must. After this, I trust never to speak of him again. Before the lines of our lives crossed, I knew him for what he was, I knew the report of him that ran the countryside. Even then I found him detestable. You heard him allude last night to the unfortunate La Binet. You heard him plead in extenuation of his fault, his mode of life, his rearing. To that there is no answer, I suppose. He conforms to type. Enough! But to me, he was the embodiment of evil, just as you have always been the embodiment of good; he was the embodiment of sin, just as you are the embodiment of purity. I had enthroned you so high, Aline, so high, and yet no higher than your place. Could I then suffer that you should be dragged down by ambition, could I suffer the evil I detected to mate with the good I loved. What could have come of it, but your own damnation, as I told you that day at Gavrilac? Because of that my detestation of him became a personal, active thing. I resolved to save you at all costs from a fate so horrible. Had you been able to tell me that you loved him it would have been different. I should have hoped that in a union sanctified by love you would have raised him to your own pure heights. But that out of considerations of worldly advancement you should lovelessly consent to mate with him . . . oh, it was vile and hopeless. And so I fought him—a rat fighting a lion

—fought him relentlessly until I saw that love had come to take in your heart the place of ambition. Then I desisted."

"Until you saw that love had taken the place of ambition!" Tears had been gathering in her eyes whilst he was speaking. Now amazement eliminated her emotion. "But when did you see that? When?"

"I—I was mistaken. I know it now. Yet, at the time . . . surely Aline, that morning when you came to beg me not to keep my engagement with him in the Bois you were moved by concern for him?"

"For him! It was concern or you she cried, without thinking what she said

But it did not convince him. "For me? When you knew—when all the world knew what I had been doing daily for a week?"

"Ah, but he—he was different from the others you had met. His reputation stood high. My uncle accounted him invincible; he persuaded me that if you met nothing could save you."

He looked at her frowning.

"Why this, Aline?" he asked her, with some sternness. "I can understand that, having changed since then you should now wish to disown those sentiments. It is a woman's way, I suppose."

"Oh, what are you saying, André? How wrong you are! It is the truth I have told you."

"And it was concern for me," he asked her, "that laid you swooning when you saw him return wounded from the meeting? That was what opened my eyes."

"Wounded? I had not seen his wound. I saw him sitting alive and apparently unhurt in his calèche, and I concluded that he had killed you as he said he would. What else could I conclude?"

He saw a light, dazzling, blinding, and it scared him. He fell back, a hand to his brow. "And that was why you fainted?" he asked, incredulously.

She looked at him without answering. As she began to realise how much she had been swept into saying by her eagerness to make him realise his error a sudden fear came creeping into her eyes.

He held out both hands to her.

"Aline Aline!" His voice broke on the name. "It was I . . ."

"Oh, blind André, I was always you—always. Never, never did I think of him, even for loveless marriage, save once for a little while, when . . . when that theatre-girl came into your life, and then . . ." She broke off shrugged, and turned her

head away. "I thought of following ambition since there was nothing left to follow."

He shook himself. "I am dreaming, of course, or else I am mad," he said.

"Blind, André; just blind," she assured him.

"Blind only where it would have been presumption to have seen."

"And yet," she answered him, with a flash of the Aline he had known of old, "I have never found you lack presumption."

M. de Kercadiou, emerging a moment later from the library window, beheld them holding hands and staring each at the other, beatifically, as if each saw Paradise in the other's face

THE END

Scaramouche
the Kingmaker

SCARAMOUCHE , THE KINGMAKER

"Dissoudre la Convention, après l'avoir avilie par la corruption de plusieurs de ses membres, et rétablir la Monarchie sur les ruines de la République, tel était le scenario du drame dont le Baron de Bitz était l'auteur."—VICOMTE DE BONALD ("François Chabot").

"... si la corruption de Robespierre n'est pas prouvée, au moins on prouvera celle d'un homme dont on l' a entouré. On avilira ainsi la Représentation Nationale et quand les départements verront qu'on guillotine successivement les députés, aucun suppléant ne voudra venir les remplacer. La Convention sera réduite à une poignée d'hommes inconnus et méprisés dont on se servira et que l'on dissoudra à gré . . . Pitt dira à la France: "Vos représentants vous ont promis le bonheur et l'abondance et ne vous ont donné que la famine et un papier inutile à vos besoins."—*Apologia of François Chabot.*

Scaramouche the Kingmaker

CHAPTER I

THE TRAVELLERS

It was suspected of him by many that he had no heart.

Repeatedly he allows this suspicion to be perceived in the course of those confessions of his upon which I drew so freely for the story of the first part of his odd life. In the beginning of that story we see him turning his back, at the dictates of affection, upon an assured career in the service of Privilege. At the end of it we see him forsaking the cause of the people in which he had prospered and, again at the dictates of affection, abandoning the great position won.

Of the man who twice within the first twenty-eight years of his life, deliberately, in the service of others, destroys his chances of success, it is foolish to say that he has no heart. But it was the whim of André-Louis Moreau to foster this illusion. His imagination had early been touched by the teaching of Epictetus, and deliberately he sought to assume the characteristics of a Stoic: one who would never permit his reason to be clouded by sentiment, or his head to be governed by his heart.

He was, of course, by temperament an actor. It was as Scaramouche, and as author, player and organizer of the Binet Troupe that he had found his true vocation. Persisting in it his genius might have won him a renown greater than the combined renowns of Beaumarchais and Talma. Desisting from it, however, he had carried his histrionic temperament into such walks of life as he thereafter trod, taking the world for his stage.

Such temperaments are common enough, and commonly they are merely tiresome.

André-Louis Moreau, however, succeeds in winning our interest by the unexpectedness of what he somewhere frankly and fantastically calls his exteriorizations. His gift of laughter is responsible for this. The comic muse is ever at his elbow, though not always obvious. She remained with him to the end,

although in this, the second part of his history, his indulgence of the old humour is fraught with a certain bitterness in a measure as the conviction is borne in upon him that in the madness of the world there is more evil than was perceived even by those philosophers who have sought to teach it sanity.

His flight from Paris at a moment when, as a man of State, a great career was opening before him, was a sacrifice dictated by the desire to procure the safety of those he loved : Aline de Kercadiou, whom he hoped to marry ; Monsieur de Kercadiou, his godfather ; and Madame de Plougastel, whose natural son it had been so lately discovered to him that he was. That flight was effected without adventure. Every barrier was removed by the passport carried by the Representative André-Louis Moreau, which announced that he travelled on the business of the National Assembly, commanded all to lend him such assistance as he might require, and warned all that they hindered him at their peril.

The berline conveying them travelled by way of Rheims ; but continuing eastward it began to find the roads increasingly encumbered by troops, gun-carriages, service-wagons and commissariat trains and all the unending impedimenta of an army on the march.

So as to make progress, they were constrained to turn north, towards Charleville, and thence east again, crossing the lines of the National Army, still commanded by Luckner and La Fayette, which awaited the enemy who for over a month now had been massing on the banks of the Rhine.

It was this definite movement of invasion which had driven the populace of France to frenzy. The storming of the Tuileries by the mob, and the horrors of the 10th of August gave the answer of the populace to the pompous minatory ill-judged manifesto bearing the signature of the Duke of Brunswick, but whose real authors were Count Fersen and the rash Queen. By its intemperate menaces this manifesto contributed more perhaps than any other cause to the ruin of the King whom it was framed to save ; for the Duke of Brunswick's threats to the people of France made the King appear in the guise of a public danger.

This, however, was not the point of view of Monsieur de Kercadiou, Lord of Gavrilac, travelling under the revolutionary ægis of his godson to safety beyond the Rhine. In the uncompromising expressions of the Duke, Quentin de Kercadiou heard the voice of the man who is master of the situation, who promises no more than it is within his power to perform. What resistance could those raw, ill-clad, ill-nourished, ill-equipped,

ill-trained, ill-armed troops through whose straggling lines they had passed, offer to the magnificent army of seventy thousand Prussians and fifty thousand Austrians, fortified by twenty-five thousand French émigrés, including the very flower of French chivalry ?

The Bréton nobleman's squat figure reclined at greater ease on the cushions of the travelling carriage after his glimpse of the ragged ill-conditioned forces of the Nation. Peace entered his soul, and cast out anxiety. Before the end of the month the allies would be in Paris. The revolutionary carnival was all but at an end. There would follow for those gentlemen of the gutter a period of Lent and penitence. He expressed himself freely in these terms, his glance upon the Citizen-Representative Moreau, as if challenging contradiction.

"If ordnance were all," said André-Louis, "I should agree with you. But battles are won by wits as well as guns ; and the wits of the man who uttered the Duke's manifesto do not command my respect."

"Ah ! And La Fayette, then ? Is that a man of genius ?" The Lord of Gavrillic sneered.

"We do not know. He has never commanded an army in the field. It may be that he will prove no better than the Duke of Brunswick "

They came to Diekirch, and found themselves in a swarm of Hessians, the advance-guard of the Prince of Hohenlohe's division which was to move upon Thionville and Metz, soldiers, these well-equipped, masterful, precisely disciplined, different indeed from those poor straggling ragamuffins who were to dispute their passage.

André-Louis had removed the tricolour sash from his olive-green riding-coat and the tricolour cockade from his conical black hat. His papers, a passport to service in France, but here a passport to the gallows, were bestowed in an inner pocket of his tightly-buttoned waistcoat, and now it was Monsieur de Kercaïou who took the initiative, announcing his name and quality to the allied officers, so as to obtain permission to pass on. It was readily yielded. Challenges were little more than an empty formality. Émigrés were still arriving, although no longer in their former numbers, and, anyway, the allies had nothing to apprehend from anyone passing behind their lines.

The weather had broken, and by sodden roads which almost hourly grew heavier, the horses fetlocks deep in mud, they came by Wittlieb, where they lay a night at a fair inn, and then with clearer skies overhead and a morass underfoot they trailed up

the fertile valley of the Moselle by miles of dripping vineyards, whose yield that year gave little promise.

And so, at long length, a full week after setting out, the berline rolled past the Ehrenbreitstein with its gloomy fortress, and rumbled over the bridge of boats into the city of Coblentz.

And now it was Madame de Plougastel's name that proved their real passport ; for hers was a name well-known in Coblentz. Her husband, Monsieur de Plougastel, was a prominent member of the excessive household by means of which the Princes maintained in exile an ultra-royal state, rendered possible by a loan from Amsterdam bankers and the bounty of the Elector of Treves.

The Lord of Gavrillac pursuing habits which had become instinct alighted his party at the town's best inn, the Three Crowns. True the National Convention, which was to confiscate the estates of emigrated noblemen, had not yet come into being ; but meanwhile those estates and their revenues were inaccessible , and the Lord of Gavrillac's possessions amounted to some twenty louis which chance had left him at the moment of departure. To this might be added the clothes in which he stood and some trinkets upon the person of Alin. The berline itself belonged to Madame de Plougastel, as did the trunks in the boot. Madame practising foresight had brought away a casket containing all her jewels, which at need should realize a handsome sum. André-Louis had left with thirty louis in his purse. But he had borne all the expenses of the journey and these had already consumed a third of that modest sum.

Money, however, had never troubled the easy-going existence of the Lord of Gavrillac. It had never been necessary for him to do more than command whatever he required. So he commanded now the best that the inn could provide in accommodation food and wine.

Had they arrived in Coblentz a month ago, they must have conceived themselves still in France, for so crowded had the place been with émigrés that hardly any language but French was to be heard in the streets, whilst the suburb of Thal, across the river, had been an armed camp of Frenchmen. Now that the army had at last departed on its errand of extinguishing the revolution and restoring to the monarchy all its violated absolutism, the French population of Coblentz, as of other Rhineland towns, had been reduced by some thousands. Many, however, still remained with the Princes. They were temporarily back at Schönbornlust, the handsome, magnificent Electoral summer residence which Clemens Wenceslaus had placed at the disposal of his royal

nephews : the two brothers of the King, the Comte de Provence and the Comte d'Artois, and the King's uncle, the Prince de Condé.

In return the Elector's generosity had been abused and his patience sorely tried.

Each of the three Princes had come accompanied by his mistress, and one by his wife as well ; and they had brought into Saxony, together with the elegancies, all the ribaldries, the gallantries and the intrigues of Versailles.

Condé, the only one of any military worth—and his military worth and reputation were considerable—had established himself at Worms and had organized there into an army the twenty-five thousand Frenchmen who had gone to range themselves under his banner for the crusade on behalf of Throne and Altar.

Monsieur and his brother the Comte d'Artois, however, were not only the true representatives of royalty to these exiles, but the enemies of the constitution which the King had accepted, and the champions of all the ancient privileges the abolition of which had been the whole aim of the original revolutionists. It was about these Princes at Coblenz that a Court had assembled itself, maintained at enormous cost at Schönbornlust for his royal nephews by their long-suffering host. Their followers with their wives and families disposed themselves in such lodgings as the town offered and their means afforded. At first money had been comparatively plentiful amongst them, and they had spent it with the prodigality of folk who had never learnt to take thought for the morrow. In that time of waiting they had beguiled their leisure in the care-free occupations that were habitual to them. They had turned the Bonn Road into an image of the Cours la Reine ; they rode and walked, gossiped, danced, gambled, made love, intrigued, and even fought duels in despite of the Electoral edicts. Nor was that all the scandal they gave. The license they permitted themselves was so considerable that the kindly old Elector had been driven to complain that the morals of his own people were being corrupted by the unseemly conduct, the insolent bearing, the debauched habits and the religious indifference of the French nobility. He even ventured to suggest to the Princes that, example being so much more powerful than precept they should set their own houses in order.

With eyebrows raised at an outlook so narrow and provincial, his nephews pointed out to him in turn that the life of a prince is never so orderly as when he has acquired a *maitresse-en-titre*. And the gentle, indulgent old archbishop could not find it in his heart to distress his royal nephews by further insistence

Monsieur de Kercadiou and his party reached Coblenz at noon on the 18th of August. Having dined and made such toilet as was possible to men without change of garments, they re-entered the still bespattered berline, and set out for the Château, a mile away.

The fact that they came straight from Paris, whence there had been no news for the past ten days, ensured them instant audience. By a broad staircase kept by glittering gold-laced officers and a spacious gallery above, where courtiers sauntered, elegant of manner, vivacious of speech, and ready of laughter as in the *Œil de Bœuf* at Versailles of old, the newcomers were brought to an ante-chamber by a gentleman usher, who went forward to announce them.

Even now that the majority of men had departed with the army, there still remained here a sufficient throng, made up of the outrageous retinue which these Princes insisted upon maintaining. Prudence in expenditure, the husbanding of their borrowed resources, was not for them.

After all, they still believed that the insubordination of the French masses was but a fire of straw which even now the Duke of Brunswick was marching to extinguish, a fire which could never have been kindled but for the supineness, the incompetence, the jacobinism of the King to whom in their hearts these émigrés were no longer loyal. Their fealty was to their own order, which within a few weeks now would be restored. The Duke's manifesto told the canaille what to expect. It should be to them as the writing on the wall to the Babylonians.

Our travellers made for a while a little group apart. André-Louis, slight and straight in his olive-green riding-coat with silver buttons, the sword through the pocket, his buckskins and knee-boots, his black hair gathered into a queue that was innocent of any roll; Monsieur de Kercadiou, in black and silver, rather crumpled, squat of figure, and middle-aged with the slightly furtive manner of a man who had never accustomed himself to numerous assemblies; Madame de Plougastel, tall and calm, dressed with a care that set off her fading beauty, her gentle wistful eyes more observant of her natural son André-Louis than of her surroundings; and Aline de Kercadiou, slight, virginal and lovely in a rose brocade, her golden hair dressed high, her blue eyes half-shyly taking stock of her surroundings.

They attracted no attention until a gentleman issuing from the presence chamber, the *salon d'honneur*, made his way briskly towards them. This gentleman, no longer young, of middle height, inclining to portliness, moved even in his present haste

with an air of consequence which left no doubt of the opinion in which he held himself. He was resplendent in yellow brocade and glittered at several points.

André-Louis had an intuition of his identity before he reached them, before he was bending formally over the hand of Madame de Plougastel, and announcing in an utterly emotionless voice his satisfaction at beholding her at last in safety.

"It was by no wish of mine, madame, as I think you are aware, that you remained so long in Paris. It would have been better, I think, for both of us had you decided to make the journey sooner. Now it was scarce worth the trouble. For very soon, following in Monsieur's train, I should have come to you. However, I give you welcome. I hope that you are well. I trust that you will have travelled comfortably."

Thus, in stilted, pompous phrases, did the Count of Plougastel receive his Countess. Without pausing for any reply from her, he swung half-aside. "Ah, my dear Gavrilac! Ever the attentive cousin, the faithful cavalier, is it not?"

André-Louis wondered was he sneering, watched him narrowly as he pressed Kercadiou's hand, and found himself there and then moved to a profound dislike for this consequential gentleman with the big head on its short thick neck, the big nose that was Bourbon in shape and the chin too big for strength but not for obstinacy when considered with the stupid mouth.

"And this is your adorable niece," the gentleman was continuing. He had a curiously purring voice and an affected enunciation. "You have grown in beauty and in stature, Mademoiselle Aline, since last we met." He looked at André-Louis, and checked, frowning, as if in question.

"This is my godson," said the Lord of Gavrilac shortly, withholding a name that had become a thought too famous.

"Your godson?" The black eyebrows were raised on that shallow brow. "Ah!"

Then others, having realized Madame de Plougastel's identity, came crowding chattering about them, with rustle of silken skirts and tapping of red-heeled shoes, until the Count, remembering the august personage awaiting the travellers, rescued them from that frivolous throng, and ushered them into the presence.

CHAPTER II

SCHÖNBORNLUST

WONDERING was his own attendance either necessary or desirable, but yielding to Monsieur de Kercadiou's gentle insistence, André-Louis found himself in a spacious pillared room that was lighted by very tall windows. A beam of pallid sunshine, breaking through heavy clouds, touched into vividness the colours of the soft Aubusson carpet, glinted on the profuse gildings against their white background, and sparkled in the great crystal chandelier that hung from the painted ceiling.

In a gilded armchair, from either side of which a flock of courtiers of both sexes was spread fanwise athwart the chamber, André-Louis observed a portly florid man in the middle thirties, dressed in grey velvet finely laced in gold with the blue ribbon of the Holy Ghost across his breast.

Without having yet reached the pronounced obesity of his brother Louis XVI, which in time he was to exceed, the Count of Provence already showed every sign of the same tendency. He had the big Bourbon nose, a narrow brow, whence his face widened downwards to a flabby double chin, and the full, excessively curling lips of the sensualist. The blue eyes were full and fine under heavy smoothly arching eyebrows. He had a look of alertness without intelligence, of importance without dignity. And observing him, André-Louis read him accurately for stupid, obstinate and vain.

The slight woman in white and blue sarcenet with the pumpkin head-dress, hovering on his right was the Countess of Provence. At no time attractive, her countenance now almost repelled by its sneering air of discontent. The younger woman on his left, who if also without conspicuous beauty of features was agreeably formed and of a lively expression, was the Countess of Balbi his recognized mistress.

Monsieur de Plougastel led his Countess forward. Monsieur inclined his powdered head, mumbling a greeting, his eyes dull. They quickened, however, when Mademoiselle de Kercadiou was presented. They seemed to glow as they took stock of her delicate golden loveliness, and the curl of the gross lips was increased into a smile.

"We give you welcome, mademoiselle. Soon we shall hope to welcome you to a worthier court such as you were born to grace."

Mademoiselle curtsied again with a murmured "Monseigneur," and would have withdrawn but that he detained her.

It was amongst his vanities to conceive himself something of a poet, and he chose now to be poetical.

How was it possible, he desired to know, that so fair a bloom from the garden of French nobility should never yet have come to adorn the court?

She answered him with commendable composure that five years ago, under the sponsorship of her uncle, Étienne de Kercadiou, she had spent some months at Versailles.

His highness protested his annoyance with himself and Fate that he should have been unaware of this. He desired Heaven to inform him how such a thing should ever have come to pass. And then he spoke of her uncle Etienne, whom he had so greatly esteemed and whose death he had never ceased to deplore. In this he was truthful enough. There was a weakness in him which made him ever seek to lean upon some particular person in his following, rendering a favourite as much a necessity to him as a mistress. For a time this place had been filled by Etienne de Kercadiou, who, had he lived, might have continued to fill it, for Monsieur had this virtue that he was loyal and steadfast in his friendships.

He detained her yet a while in aimless talk, whilst those about him, perceiving here no more than an exhibition of gallantry in a man whose callow ambition it was ever to appear in the guise of a gallant, grew impatient for the news from Paris which was expected from the men accompanying her.

Madame smiled sourly, and whispered in the ear of her reader, the elderly Madame de Gourbillon. The Countess of Balbi smiled too; but it was the indulgent, humorous smile of a woman who if without illusions is also without bitterness.

In the immediate background the Lord of Gavrillac waited with his hands behind him, nodding his great head, the light of satisfaction on his rugged pock-marked countenance to see his niece honoured by so much royal notice. At his side André-Louis stood stiff and grim, inwardly damning the impudence with which his highness smirked and leered at Aline before the entire court. It was, he supposed, within the exercise of a royal prerogative to be reckless of what scandal he might cause.

It may have resulted from this that when at last the Lord of Gavrillac having been presented and required to announce the latest news from Paris, begged leave to depute the task to his godson, there sprang from André-Louis' resentment a self-

possession so hard and cold as to be almost ruffling to the feelings of those present.

His bow in acknowledgment of Monsieur's nod was scarcely more than perfunctory. Then erect, the lean keen face impassive, his voice metallic, he delivered the brutal news without any softening terms.

"A week yesterday, on the tenth of the month, the populace of Paris, goaded to frenzy by the manifesto of the Duke of Brunswick and driven to terror by the news of a foreign army already on the soil of France, turned with the blind ferocity of an animal at bay. It stormed the Palace of the Tuileries and massacred to a man the Swiss Guard and the gentleman who had remained there to defend the person of his Majesty."

An outcry of horror interrupted him. Monsieur had heaved himself to his feet. His countenance had lost much of its high colour.

"And the King?" he quavered. "The King?"

"His Majesty and the royal family found shelter under the protection of the National Assembly."

An awed silence ensued broken presently by Monsieur's impatience.

"What else, sir? What else?"

"The Sections of Paris appear to be at present the masters of the State. It is doubtful if the National Assembly can stand against them. They control the populace. They direct its fury into such channels as seems best to them."

"And that is all you know sir? All you can tell us?"

"That is all, monseigneur."

The large prominent eyes continued to survey him if without hostility, without kindliness.

"Who are you, sir? What is your name?"

"Moreau, highness. André-Louis Moreau."

It was a plebeian name, awakening no memories in that elegant, frivolous world of woefully short memories.

"Your condition, sir?"

For Kercadiou, Aline and Madame de Plougastel the moment was charged with suspense. It was so easy for André-Louis to avoid, as they hoped, full revelation. But he showed himself contemptuous of subterfuge.

"Until lately, until a week ago, I represented the Third Estate of Ancenis in the National Assembly."

He felt rather than perceived the horrified inward recoil from him of every person present.

"A patriot!" said Monsieur, much as he might have said "a pestilence".

Monsieur de Kercadiou came breathlessly to his godson's rescue. "Ah, but, Monsieur, one who has seen the error of his ways. One who is now proscribed. He has sacrificed everything to his sense of duty to me, his godfather. He has rescued Madame de Plougastel, my niece and myself from that shambles."

Monsieur looked at the Lord of Gavrilac, at the Countess of Plougastel, and lastly at Aline. He found Mademoiselle de Kercadiou's glance full of intercession, and it seemed to soften him.

"You would add, mademoiselle?" he invited gently.

She was troubled. "Why . . . why only that considering his sacrifice, I hope that Monsieur Moreau will deserve well of your Highness. He cannot now return to France."

Monsieur inclined his fleshly head. "We will remember that only. That we are in his debt for this. It will lie with Monsieur Moreau to make it possible for us in the time that is fast approaching to discharge this debt."

André-Louis said nothing. In the hostile eyes that were bent upon him from every side his calm seemed almost insolent. Yet two eyes in that assembly considered him with interest and without hostility. They belonged to a stiffly-built man of middle height and not more than thirty years of age, plainly dressed without fripperies: a man with a humorous mouth above an aggressive chin, and a prominent nose flanked by lively quick-moving dark eyes under heavy brows.

Presently, when the court had broken into groups to discuss this dreadful news from Paris, and André-Louis, ignored, had withdrawn into one of the window embrasures, this man approached him.

He carried a three-cornered hat with a white cockade, tucked under his right arm. His left hand rested on the steel hilt of his slim sword.

He came to a halt before André-Louis.

"Ah, Monsieur Moreau! Or is it Citizen Moreau?"

"Why, which you please, monsieur," said André-Louis, alert.

"'Monsieur' will accord better with our environment." He spoke with a soft, slurred accent, almost like a Spaniard, thus proclaiming his Gascon origin. "Once, unless my memory betrays me, you were better known by yet another title. The Paladin of the Third Estate, was it not?"

André-Louis was not abashed. "That was in 'eighty-nine, at the time of the spadassinicides."

"Ah!" The Gascon smiled. "Your admission is of a piece with the rest. I am of those who can admire gallantry wherever found. I love a gallant enemy as I loathe a flabby friend."

"You have also a taste for paradox."

"If you will. You made me regret that I was not a member of the Constituent Assembly so that I might have crossed blades with you when you made yourself the militant champion of the Third Estate."

"You are tired of life?" said André-Louis who began to mistrust the gentleman's motives.

"On the contrary, *mon petit* I love life so intensely that I must be getting its full savour; and that is only to be got when it is placed in hazard. Without that"—he shrugged—"as well might one be born an ox."

The declaration, thought André-Louis, was one that went excellently with the man's accent.

"You are from Gascony *monsieur*," he said.

Mock gravity overspread the other's intrepid countenance. "Po' Cap de Diou!" he swore as if to leave no doubt on the score of his origin. "Now that is an innuendo."

"I am always accommodating. It is to help you on your way."

"On my way? But on my way to what, name of God?"

"To live intensely by the thrill of placing your life in hazard."

"You suppose that that is what I seek?" The Gascon fell to fanning himself with his hat. "Almost you put me in a heat, sir." He smiled. "I see the train of thought: this enemy camp; the general hostility to your opinions overriding even the generous thing you have done. There is no graciousness at court, sir, as any fool may perceive once his eyes cease to be dazzled by its superficial glitter. You gather that I am no man of courts. Let me add that I am certainly not the bully-lackey of any party. I desired, sir, to become acquainted with you. That is all. I am a monarchist to the marrow of my bones, and I detest your republican principles. Yet I admired your championship of the Third even more than I abhorred the cause you championed. Paradoxical, as you say. I am like that. You bore yourself as I should have wished to bear myself in your place. Where the devil is the paradox after all?"

André-Louis was brought to the point of laughter. "You meet my stupidity with graciousness, sir."

"Pish! I am not gracious. I but desire our better acquaintance. My name is de Batz: Colonel Jean de Batz Baron of

Armanthieu, by Gontz, which is in Gascony, as you have guessed. Though how the devil you guessed it, God alone knows."

Monsieur de Kercadiou was ambling towards them. The Baron made a leg valedictorily. "Monsieur!"

And "Serviteur!" said André-Louis with an answering courtesy.

CHAPTER III

BARON DE BATZ

ANDRÉ-LOUIS was annoyed; not hotly annoyed; he was never that, but coldly bitter. He expressed it without tact considering his audience.

"The more I see of the nobility, the better I like the canaille; the more I see of royalty, the more I admire the roture."

They sat—André-Louis, Aline and M. de Kercadiou—in the long narrow room appropriated by the Lord of Gavrilac on the first floor of the Three Crowns. It was a room entirely Saxon in character. There was no carpet on the waxed floor. The walls were lined in polished pine adorned with some trophies of the chase: a half-dozen stags' heads, with melancholy glass eyes, the mask of a boar with enormous tusks, a hunting horn, an antiquated fowling-piece and some other kindred odds and ends. On the oak table, from which a waiter had lately removed the remains of breakfast, stood a crystal bowl containing a great sheaf of roses with which some lilies had been intermingled.

These flowers provided one source of André-Louis' ill-humour. They had been brought from Schönbornlust an hour ago by a very elegant, curled and pomaded gentleman, who announced himself as Monsieur de Jaucourt. He had delivered them with expressions of homage from Monsieur to Mademoiselle de Kercadiou, in the hope—so ran the royal message—that they might brighten the lodging graced by Mademoiselle until more suitable quarters should be found for her. The quarters in prospect were disclosed by a note of which M. de Jaucourt was also the bearer, a note from Madame to Mademoiselle de Kercadiou. And this

was the second source of André-Louis' annoyance. The note announced that Mademoiselle de Kercadiou was appointed a lady-in-waiting to Madame. Aline's bright transport at this signal and unexpected honour had supplied André-Louis' annoyance with yet a third source.

With deliberate rudeness upon apprehending M. de Jaucourt's mission, he had gone to take his stand by the window, with his back to his companions, watching the rain that fell in sheets upon the churned mud of Coblenz. He had not even troubled to turn when M. de Jaucourt had taken ceremonious leave. It was M. de Kercadiou who had held the door for the departing messenger.

And now when at last André-Louis condescended to speak, his slight, agile, well-knit body moving restlessly in the gloom and damp chill of that long chamber, it was to interrupt Aline's delighted chatter in those uncompromising terms.

She was startled, astounded. Her uncle was scandalized. In the old days for the half of those words he would have risen up in wrath, stormed upon his godson, and banished him from his presence. But in the course of that journey from Paris a lethargy had been settling upon the Lord of Gavrilac. His spirit was reduced. It was as if, bending under the strain of the grim events of some ten days ago, he had suddenly grown old. Nevertheless, he reared his great head to combat this outrageous statement, and there was a note of anger in his voice.

"While you live under the protection of the one and the other it were more decent to repress these republican insolences."

Aline surveyed him with a little frown above her candid eyes. "What has disgruntled you, André?"

He looked down upon her across the table at which she was seated, and worship rose in him, as it ever did when he considered her, so fresh, so pure, so delicate, so dainty, her golden hair dressed high, but innocent of powder, a heavy curl resting on the right of her milk-white neck.

"I am fearful of all that approach you lest they go unaware of the holy ground upon which they tread."

"And now we are to have the Song of Songs," her uncle mocked him. Whilst Aline's eyes were tender, the Lord of Gavrilac pursued his raillery.

"You think that M. de Jaucourt should have removed his shoes before entering this shrine?"

"I should have preferred him to have stayed away. M. de Jaucourt is the lover of Madame de Balbi, who is the mistress of Monsieur. In what relationship those two gentleman stand to

each other as a consequence I'll not inquire. But their brows would help to adorn that wall." And he flung out a hand to indicate the antlered heads that gazed down upon them.

The Lord of Gavrilac shifted uncomfortably in his chair. "If you would practise towards my niece half the respect you demand for her from others it would be more decent." Severely he added: "You stoop to scandal."

"No need to stoop. It comes breast-high. It assails the nostrils."

Aline, whose innocence had been pierced at last by his allusion, coloured a little and looked away from him. Meanwhile he pursued his theme.

"Madame de Balbi is a lady-in-waiting upon Madame. And that, monsieur, is the honour proposed for your niece and my future wife."

"My God!" ejaculated M. de Kercadiou. "What will you insinuate? You are horrible."

"It is the fact, sir, that is horrible. I merely interpret it. It but remains for you to ask yourself if that vicious simulacrum of a Court is a fitting environment for your niece."

"It would not be if I believed you."

"You don't believe me?" André-Louis seemed surprised. "Do you believe your own senses, then? Can you recall how the news was received yesterday? How slight a ripple it made on the face of waters which it should have lashed into a storm?"

"Well-bred people do not abandon themselves in their emotions."

"But they are grave at least. Did you observe much gravity after the first gasp of consternation? Did you, Aline?" Without giving her time to answer, he went on. "Monsieur held you in talk for some time; longer perhaps than Madame de Balbi relished. . . ."

"André! What are you saying? This is outrageous."

"Infamous!" said her uncle.

"I was about to ask you of what he talked. Was it of the horrors of last week? Of the fate of the King, his brother?"

"No."

"Of what, then? Of what?"

"I scarcely remember. He talked of . . . oh, of nothing. He was very kind . . . rather flattering. . . . What would you? He talked . . . Oh, he talked as a gentleman talks to a lady, I suppose."

"You suppose?" He was grim. The lean face with its prominent nose and cheek-bones was almost wolfish. "You

are a lady, and you have talked with gentlemen before Did they all talk to you as he talked ?

"Why, in some such fashion. André, what is in your mind ?"

"Ay, in God's name, what ?" barked M. de Kercadiou.

"It is in my mind that at such a time Monsieur might have found other occupation than to talk to a lady merely as gentlemen talk to ladies."

"You make one lose patience," said M. de Kercadiou gruffly. "Once the shock of the news was spent, where was the cause for anxiety ? Within a month the allies will be at the gates of Paris, and the King will be delivered."

"Unless the provocation makes the people kill him in the meantime. There was always that for Monsieur to consider. And anyway, it is in my mind that Aline should not be a lady-in-waiting in a group that includes Madame de Balbi."

"But in Heaven's name, André !" cried the Lord of Gavrilac. "What can I do ? This is not an invitation. It is a command."

"Madame is not the Queen. Not yet."

"As good as the Queen here. Monsieur is regent de posse, and may soon be so de facto."

"So that," said André slowly, almost faltering "the appointment is not to be refused ?"

Aline looked at him wistfully, but said nothing. He got up abruptly, stalked to the window again, and stood there tapping the pane and looked out as before upon the melancholy rain, a queer oppression at his heart. Kercadiou, whose scowl bore witness to his annoyance would have spoken but that Aline signalled silence to him.

She rose and crossed to André's side. She set her muslin-clad arm about his neck, drew down his head and laid her smooth, softly-rounded white cheek against his own. "André ! Are you not being very foolish ? Very difficult ? Surely, surely you do not do me the honour of being jealous of Monsieur ? Of Monsieur !"

He was softened by the caress, by the intoxicating touch of her so new to him still so rarely savoured yet in this odd week of their betrothal.

"My dear, you are so much to me that I am full of tears for you. I dread the effect upon you of life in that Court where corruption is made to wear a brave exterior."

"But I have been to Court before" she reminded him.

"To Versailles, yes. But this is not Versailles although it strives to put on the same appearance."

"Do you lack faith in me ?"

"Ah, not that. Not that!"

"What then?"

He frowned; searched his mind; found nothing definite there. "I do not know," he confessed. "I suppose love makes me fearful, foolish."

"Continue to be fearful and foolish, then." She kissed his cheek and broke from him with a laugh, and thereby put an end to the discussion.

That same afternoon Mademoiselle de Kercadiou entered upon her exalted duties, and when later M. de Kercadiou and his godson presented themselves at Schönbornlust, and stood once more amid the courtiers in that white-and-gold salon, Aline, a vision of loveliness in coral taffetas and silver lace, told them of the graciousness of Madame's welcome and of the condescension of Monsieur.

"He spoke to me at length of you, André."

"Of me?" André-Louis was startled.

"Your manner yesterday made him curious about you. He inquired in what relationship we stood. I told him that we are affianced. Then, because he seemed surprised, I told him something of your history. How once you had represented your godfather in the States of Brittany, where you were the most powerful advocate of the nobility. How the killing of your friend Philippe de Vilmorin had turned you into a revolutionary. How in the end you had turned again, and at what sacrifice you had saved us and brought us out of France. He regards you very favourably, André."

"Ah? He said so?"

She nodded. "He said that you have a very resolute air, and that he had judged you to be a bold, enterprising man."

"He meant to say that I am impudent and do not know my place."

"André!" she reproached him.

"Oh, he is right. I don't. I refuse to know it until it is a place worth knowing."

A tall, spare gentleman in black approached them, a swarthy man in the middle thirties, calm and assured of manner. His cheeks were deeply scored with lines, and hollow, as if from loss of teeth. This and the close set of his eyes lent a sinister air to the not unhandsome face. He came, he announced, to seek the acquaintance of Monsieur Moreau. Aline presented him as Monsieur le Comte d'Entragues, a name already well-known for that of a daring, resolute royalist agent, a man saturated with the spirit of intrigue.

He made amiable small talk until the Countess of Provence, a foolish artificial smile on her plain face, descended upon them. Archly scolding them for seducing her new lady-in-waiting from her duties, she swept Aline away and left the two men together. But they were not long alone. M. le Comte d'Artois very deliberately approached them, a tall, handsome man of thirty-five, so elegant of shape and movement that it was difficult to believe that he sprang from the same stock as his ponderous brothers, King Louis and Monsieur de Provence.

He was attended by a half-dozen gentlemen, two of whom wore the glittering green and silver with scarlet collars which was the uniform of his own bodyguard. Among the others André-Louis beheld the sturdy, sardonic M. de Batz, who flashed him a smile of friendly recognition, and the pompous countenance of M. de Plougastel, who nodded frigidly.

Monsieur d'Artois, gravely courteous, his fine eyes intent, expressed satisfaction at the presence here of Monsieur Moreau in the happy circumstances which brought him. Soon André-Louis began to suspect that there was calculation in all this. For after M. de Artois' compliments came a shrewd questioning from M. d'Enragues on affairs in Paris and the movements and immediate aims of the revolutionary circles.

André-Louis answered frankly and freely where he could and with no sense of betraying anyone. In his heart he believed that the information he supplied could no more change the course of destiny than a weather-prophet's judgments can control the elements. This frankness conveyed the impression that he served the cause of the monarchists, and Monsieur d'Artois commended him for it.

"You will permit me to rejoice, Monsieur Moreau, in that a gentleman of your parts should have seen at last the error of his ways."

"It is not the error of my ways that matters or was deplorable."

The dry answer startled them. "What then, monsieur?" asked the King's brother, as dryly.

"The circumstance that those whose duty it is to enforce the constitution so laboriously achieved, should be allowing their power to slip into the hands of scoundrels who will enlist a desperate rabble to gain them the ascendancy."

"So that you are but half a convert, Monsieur Moreau?" His highness spoke slowly. He sighed. "A pity! You draw between two sets of canaille a distinction too fine for me. I had thought to offer you employment in the army. But since its aim is to

sweep away without discrimination your constitutional friends as well as the others, I will not distress you with the offer."

He swung abruptly on his heel and moved away, his gentlemen followed him, with the exception of Plougastel and de Batz ; and of these Monsieur de Plougastel at once made it plain that he had lingered to condemn.

"You were ill-advised," he said, gloomily self-sufficient.

"To come to Coblenz, do you mean, monsieur ?"

"To take that tone with his highness. It was . . . unwise. You have ruined yourself."

"I am used to that. I have often done it."

Considering how André-Louis had last ruined himself with the revolutionaries and that Madame de Plougastel was one of those for whose sake he had done it, the hit, if sly, was shrewd and palpable.

"Ah, we know. We know your generosity, monsieur," Plougastel made haste to amend in some slight confusion. "But this was . . . wanton. A little tact, monsieur. A little reticence."

André-Louis looked him between the eyes. "I'll practise it now with you, monsieur."

He wondered why he disliked so much this husband of the lady whose natural son he knew himself to be. His first glimpse of him had been almost enough to make André-Louis understand and excuse his mother's frailty. This dull, pompous, shallow man, who lived by forms and ready-made opinions, incapable of independent thought, could never have commanded the fidelity of any woman. The marvel was not that Madame de Plougastel should have had a lover, but that she should have confined herself to one. It was, thought André-Louis, a testimonial to her innate purity.

Meanwhile Monsieur de Plougastel was being immensely, ludicrously dignified.

"I suspect, sir, that you laugh at me. I am too deeply in your debt to be in a position to resent it. You should remember that, sir. You should remember that." And he sidled away, a man offended.

"It's an ungrateful task, the giving of advice," said de Batz, ironical.

"Too ungrateful to be worth undertaking uninvited."

De Batz checked, stared, then frankly laughed. "You are quick. Sometimes too quick. As now. And it's as bad to be too soon as too late. As a fencing-master. you should know that.

The secret of success in life as in swordsmanship lies in a proper timing."

"All this will have a meaning," said André-Louis.

"Why, that I had no notion of offering advice. I never give unless I am sure of being thanked."

"I hope that you do yourself less than justice."

"Faith, I hope so too. You goad a man. You would make it almost a pleasure to quarrel with you."

"Few have found it so. Is that your aim Monsieur de Batz?"

"Oh! Far from it, I assure you." The Gascon smiled. "From what you said to M. d'Artois just now I gather that you are at least a monarchist."

"If I am anything at all monsieur, which I sometimes doubt. I wrought, of course with those who sought to give France a constitution, to set up a constitutional monarchy akin to that which governs England. There was nothing hostile to the King in this. Indeed, his majesty, himself, has always professed to favour the idea."

"Whereby his majesty became unpopular with Messieurs his brothers here and with the nobles, so that some thirty thousand of them who support absolutism and privilege have emigrated and have set up here a new court. France to-day is a little like the Papacy when it had two sees, one in Rome and one in Avignon. This is the stronghold of absolutism and since you not only are an enemy of absolutism but have actually divulged the fact, there is nothing for you to do here. You have, in fact been told so by M. d'Artois."

"Now it is not good for an able and enterprising young man to be without employment. And for a monarchist abundant work is waiting at this moment."

The Baron paused, his keen eyes on André-Louis' face.

"Continue, pray monsieur."

"It is kind of you to wish to hear me further." M. de Batz looked about him. They stood in mid-apartment, cleaving as it were the stream of sauntering courtiers. Away on their right, by the great marble fireplace, Monsieur, in dark blue, with a star of diamonds sparkling on his breast, sprawled untidily in an armchair. Idly he had thrust the ferrule of his cane into the inner side of his left shoe, and he was prodding with it there whilst entertaining a group of ladies in a conversation too gay and lively to be concerned with the heavy matters of the hour. Ever and anon his laugh would float across the room. It was the loud, unrestrained laugh of a foolish man; such a laugh as that

which in his brother Louis XVI had offended the fine susceptibilities of the Marquise de Lâge, and there was a false note in it to the sensitive ears of André-Louis. He considered that he would not trust either the intelligence or the sentiments of a man with such a laugh. He frowned to see Aline foremost in the group, which included the Countess of Balbi, the Duchess of Caylus and the Countess of Montléart; he was irritated by the expression in the eyes which Monsieur continually bent upon Aline and by Aline's apparent satisfaction in this royal notice.

Monsieur de Batz took him by the arm. "Let us move where we shall be less in the way and better able to talk."

André-Louis suffered himself to be steered into the embrasure of a window that overlooked the courtyard, where carriages of every kind and description waited. The rain had ceased and again, as yesterday at this hour, the sun was struggling to pierce the heavy clouds.

"The King's position," M. de Batz was saying, "is grown extremely precarious. He will have come to realize the wisdom of the emigration of his brothers and the nobles which he condemned when it took place. No doubt he realized it when he attempted to follow them only to be turned back at Varennes. He will be ready enough, therefore, to be fetched away now if it can be contrived. As a monarchist, Monsieur Moreau, you should desire to see the monarch out of peril. Would you be prepared to labour to contrive it?"

André-Louis took time to reply.

"Such a labour as that should be well rewarded."

"Rewarded? You do not believe, then, that virtue is its own reward?"

"Experience has shown me that the virtuous commonly perish of want."

The Baron seemed disappointed. "For so young a man you are oddly cynical."

"You mean that my perceptions are not clouded by emotionalism."

"I mean, sir, that you are not even consistent. You announce yourself a monarchist, yet you remain indifferent to the fate of the monarch."

"Because my monarchism is not personal to Louis XVI. It is the office that matters, not the holder. King Louis XVI may perish, but there will still be a king in France, even if he does not reign."

The dark face of de Batz was grave. "You take a great many words, sir, merely to say 'no'. You disappoint me. I

had conceived you a man of action a man of bold enterprises. You reveal yourself as merely academic."

"There must be theory behind all practice, M. de Batz I do not quite know what you propose to do or how you propose to do it. But the task is not one for me"

De Batz looked sour. "So be it. But I'll not conceal my regret. It may not surprise you, sir, incredible though it may seem, that I cannot find here a dozen gentlemen to engage with me in this enterprise. When I heard you announce yourself a monarchist I took heart, for you would be worth a score of these fribbles to me. I might rake all France and never find a man more apt to my need."

"You are pleased to flatter me, M. de Batz."

"Indeed, no. You have the qualities which the task demands. And you will not lack for friends among those in power, who would help you out of a difficult situation if you should fall into one."

But André-Louis shook his head. "You overrate both my qualities and my influence with my late associates As I have said, sir, the task is not one for me."

"Ah! A pity!" said de Batz frigidly, and moved away leaving André-Louis with the impression that he had missed the only chance of making a friend that was offered him at Schönbornlust.

CHAPTER IV

THE REVOLUTIONARY

THE days dragged on at Coblenz—days of waiting in which the hours were leaden-footed—their monotony intensified for André-Louis by the persistent foulness of the weather, which kept him within doors.

Mademoiselle de Kercadiou, however, was scarcely aware of it. Her beauty, liveliness and amiability, winning the commendation of all, had justified the warmth of her welcome at court. With Monsieur and Madame alike she was in high favour and even Madame de Balbi was observed to use her with great consideration, whilst of the men about the Princes it was said

that one-half at least were in love with her and in hot rivalry to serve her.

It was a state of things that made for the happiness of everybody but André-Louis, doomed to idleness and aimlessness in this environment into which he had been thrust, but in which there seemed to be no place or part for him. And then abruptly something happened which at last provided him with occupation for his wits.

He was taking the air one evening when it was so foul underfoot that only his restlessness could have sent him abroad. The wind had dropped and the air was close. On the heights of Pfaffendorf, across the Rhine, the green of the woods was vividly metallic against a sullen background of storm-clouds. He trudged on, following the yellow, swollen river, past the bridge of boats, with the mass of Ehrenbreitstein beyond and the grim fortress, like some grey, sprawling, ever-vigilant monster. He reached the confluence that gives Coblenz its name, and turning to the left followed now the tributary Moselle. Dusk was upon the narrow ways of the Alter Graben when he reached them. He turned a corner into a street that led directly to the Liebfrauenkirche, and came face to face with a man who at close quarters checked in his stride, to pause for an instant, then brushed swiftly past him and went on at an accelerated pace.

It was so odd that André-Louis halted there and swung about. Four things he had sensed : that this man, whoever he might be, had recognized him ; that the meeting had taken him by surprise ; that he had been about to speak ; and that he had changed his mind, and then quickened his step so as to avoid a disclosure of himself. Nor was this all. Whilst André-Louis' face under the narrow-brimmed conical hat was still discernible in the fading daylight, the other's was in the masking shadow of a wide castor, and as if that were not enough he wore a cloak that muffled him to the nose.

Moved by curiosity and suspicion to go after him, André-Louis overtook him in a dozen swift strides, and was tapping him on the shoulder.

"A word with you, my friend. I think we should know each other."

The man bounded forward and round, loosening his cloak and disengaging his arms from its folds. In the very act of turning he whipped out a small sword, and presented the point at André-Louis' breast.

"At your peril !" His voice was muffled by the cloak. "Be off, you footpad, before I put half a yard of steel in your entrails."

Being unarmed, André-Louis hesitated for a couple of heart-beats. Then he played a trick that he had practised and taught in his fencing-master days in the Rue du Hasard, an easy trick if resolutely performed, but fatal to the performer if in the course of it he hesitates. With a rigid extended arm he knocked aside the blade, engaging it at the level of his elbow ; swiftly continuing the movement, as if in a counterparry, he partially enveloped it, seized the hilt by the quillons, and wrenched the weapon away. Almost before the other could realize what had happened he found the point of his own sword presented to his vitals.

"To take me for a footpad is a poor pretence. You wear too many clothes for an honest man on so warm an evening. Let us look at this face of yours, my friend." André-Louis leaned forward, and with his left hand pulled away the masking cloak, peering into the face which showed white under the shadow of the wide hat. Instantly, in recognition, he fell back, dropping the point of the sword and exclaiming in his profound amazement.

Before him stood the Representative Isaac Le Chapelier, that lawyer of Rennes who, having begun by being amongst André-Louis' most active enemies, had ended by being in many respects his closest friend, the protector whose encouragement and sponsorship had resulted in his election to the National Assembly. To meet this distinguished revolutionary, who once had occupied the Assembly's presidential chair, lurking here in a by-street of Coblenz in obvious fear of detection was the last thing that André-Louis could have expected. When he had conquered his astonishment he was moved to laughter.

"On my life, yours is an odd way to greet an old friend, Isaac ! Half a yard of steel in my entrails, eh ?" On a sudden thought he asked : "Have you come after me by any chance ?"

Le Chapelier's answer was scornful. "After you ? My God ! You think yourself of consequence if you suppose that a member of the Assembly is sent to fetch you back."

"I did not ask you were you sent. I wondered if you had come out of the love you bear me, or some such weakness. If that is not what brings you to Coblenz, what does ? And why are you afraid of recognition ? Are you spying here, Isaac ?"

"Better and better," said the deputy. "Your wits, my dear, have grown rusty since you left us. However, here I am ; and a word from you can destroy me. What are you going to do ?"

"You disgust me," said André-Louis. "Here. Take your sword. You conceive then that friendship carries no obligations. Take your sword I say. There are people coming. We shall attract attention."

The deputy took the proffered weapon, and rapidly sheathed it. "I have learnt," he said, "to mistrust even friendship in political matters."

"Not from me. Our relations never taught you that lesson."

"Since you are here, I must suppose that you have turned your coat again; that you've returned to the fold of privilege. That will have its duties. It is what I realized the moment I set eyes on you. That is why I should have preferred to avoid you."

"Let us walk," said André-Louis, and taking Le Chapelier by the arm he persuaded him along the way he had been going before his progress was interrupted.

The deputy, reassured by now that he had no betrayal to fear from this man with whom for years he had been so closely associated, allowed himself to talk freely. He was in Coblenz on a mission from the National Assembly to the Elector of Treves. The Assembly viewed with the gravest concern this massing of émigré forces, and this sheltering of émigré intriguers and counter-revolutionary plotters in these limitrophe provinces. Roused to action by the same influences which in the people had produced the events of the 10th of August, the Assembly had dispatched the Deputy Le Chapelier to inform the Elector that France must regard this state of things as an act of calculated hostility, of which, should it continue, the Nation must signify its resentment.

"I may appear to be a little late," Le Chapelier concluded, "since already the émigrés may be said to be quitting Coblenz, and the armies are on the march; but I am still in time to contrive that their retreat shall be cut off, and that they shall not return here to resume their activities. I am frank with you, André, because I care not how widely-known may be the attitude of the Assembly. The only secrecy I ask of you is on the subject of my presence. Your friends of the party of privilege can be murderously vindictive. I must remain a day or two yet, because I am to see the Elector again when he has considered his position. Meanwhile, there is no profit in denouncing me to the French nobles here."

"Profit or not, the recommendation is almost an impertinence." With this André-Louis changed the subject to inquire what was known and said of his own flight from Paris.

Le Chapelier shrugged. "It is not yet understood. When it is, you will have ruined yourself: for Mademoiselle de Kercadiou, I suppose."

"For her and others."

"Quentin de Kercadiou has been proscribed as an émigré, his possessions confiscated. So has Monsieur de Plougastel. Why you should have taken his wife under your wing in your flight, Heaven alone knows. Have they made you welcome here, at least?"

"Without excessive warmth," said André-Louis.

"Ah! And now what do you do? Do you join this army of invasion?"

"It has been signified to me that my views, which are merely monarchist, preclude my serving in an army that is to fight in the cause of privilege."

"Then why remain?"

"To pray for victory. My fortunes are bound up with it."

"Fool, André! Your fortunes are bound up with us. Come back with me before it is too late. The Assembly thinks too well of you, remembers too well your services, not to take a lenient view, not to accept whatever explanation we concoct. Your return to your place will be easy if you are well supported, and you can count upon my support, which is not negligible."

It was not indeed. Le Chapelier in those days was a considerable power in the Assembly. He was the author of that law which bears his name and which reveals the clarity of view and purity of motives of the architects of the constitution. Mirabeau, in the hour of need, as a measure of resistance to the abuse of privilege, had shown the workers the power of the strike.

"To render yourselves formidable," he had told them, "you need but to become immobile."

Le Chapelier, when once privilege had been swept away, perceived the danger to the state of that new-found power of one of its classes. The statute for which he was responsible forbade any federation of workers for purposes of exactions, on the ground that the Nation had not abolished despotism in the palace to make way for despotism in the gutter.

His ægis, therefore, was not an ægis to be despised. Nor did André-Louis despise it, although he shook his head.

"You have a trick of turning up at moments of crisis, Isaac, and pointing the way to me. But this time I do not follow it. I am committed."

They were now in a narrow street behind the Liebfraukirche. The dusk had deepened almost into night. From an open doorway a shaft of light fell athwart the moist, gleaming kidney stones with which the street was paved. Le Chapelier came to a halt.

"It is, then, it seems, but *ave atque vale*. We have met, then, but to part again. I am lodged here."

A woman of broad untidy shape loomed in the doorway, and seeing who came, surveyed both him and his companion as they stood revealed in the light.

"I am lucky to leave you with my entrails whole," André mocked him. "May you prosper, Isaac, until we meet again."

They shook hands. Le Chapelier went in. The door was closed by the woman, who muttered a greeting to her lodger, and André-Louis set out to return to the Three Crowns.

CHAPTER V

THE RESCUE

THE afternoon of the following day saw André Louis at Schönbornlust, drawn thither by Aline as by a magnet. But this time when he presented himself the gentleman-usher who had passed him into the presence on the two former occasions affected not to know him. He inquired his name and sought it in a list he held of those who had the entrée. He announced that it was not there. Could he serve Monsieur Moreau? Whom particularly did Monsieur Moreau seek? There was a sly insolence in his manner that stung André-Louis. He perceived in it that, like half these courtiers, the fellow had the soul of a lackey. But he dissembled his vexation, pretended not to observe the nudges, glances and smiles of those others who, like himself now, must not aspire beyond the ante-chamber and who were enjoying the rebuff of one who had so confidently gone forward.

He desired, he announced after a moment's thought, a word with Madame de Plougastel. The gentleman-usher beckoned a page, a pert lad in white satin, and dispatched him to bear the name of Monsieur Moreau—Moreau, was it not?—to Madame la Comtesse de Plougastel. The page looked at Monsieur Moreau as if he were a tradesman who had come to collect a bill, and vanished beyond the sacred portal which was guarded by two officers in gold-laced scarlet coats, white waistcoats and blue breeches.

André-Louis took a turn in that spacious ante-chamber among the members of the lesser nobility and the subaltern officers who peopled it. They made up an oddly assorted crowd. Most of the officers glittered in uniforms, the purchase of which had rendered them bankrupt. The others and their womenfolk were in garments which showed every stage of wear, from some that were modishly cut and still bore the bloom of freshness, to others which, rubbed and soiled and threadbare, were at the last point of shabbiness. But those who wore them had in common with the rest at least the same assumptions of haughtiness, the same air of quiet, well-bred insolence, the same trick of looking down their aristocratic noses. All the airs and graces of the *Cœuil de Bœuf* were to be found here.

André-Louis suffered with indifference the cool stares and the levelling of quizzing glasses to scan his unpowdered hair, his plain long riding-coat and the knee-boots from which yesterday's mud had been laboriously removed. But he was not required to endure it long. Madame de Plougastel did not keep him waiting, and by her friendly wistful smile of welcome this great lady shattered the scorn with which those lesser folk had presumed to regard her visitor.

"My good André!" She set a fine hand upon his arm. "You bring me news of Quentin?"

"He is better to-day, madame. He shows signs, too, of a recovery of spirit. I came, madame . . . Oh, to be frank, I came with the hope to see Aline."

"And me, André?" There was gentle reproach in the tone.

"Madame!" he said on a low note of protest.

She understood and sighed. "Ah yes, my dear. And they would not let you pass. You are out of favour. M. d'Artois was not pleased with your politics, and Monsieur does not regard you with too friendly an eye. But soon this will cease to matter, and you will be safely back at Gavrilac. Perhaps in the years to come I shall see you there sometimes . . ." She broke off. Her eyes dwelt upon his lean, keen, resolute face, and they were sadly tender. "Wait here. I'll bring Aline to you."

When Aline came a ripple of fresh interest almost of mild excitement ran through the antechamber. There were whisperings, and from one woman whose whisper was not hushed enough André-Louis caught the words: ". . . the Kercadiou . . . and Madame de Balbi will need to look to herself. She will require all her wit to make up for her fading beauty. Not that she was ever beautiful."

The allusion to Mademoiselle de Kercadiou was obscure. But André-Louis was moved to inward anger by a suspicion that already the scandalmongers of the court were preying upon her name.

She stood before him radiant in her gown of coral taffetas with rich *pointe de Venise* about its *décolletage*. She was a little out of breath. She had but a moment, she declared. She had slipped away for just a word with him. She was in attendance upon Madame, and must not neglect her duties. Kindly she deplored in him the indiscretion which had procured his exclusion from the presence. But he could depend upon her to do her best to make his peace for him with the Princes.

He received the proposal coldly.

"I would not have you in any man's debt on my account Aline."

She laughed at him. "Faith, sir, you must learn to curb this lordly independence. I have already spoken to Monsieur though not yet with much result. The moment is not propitious. It is of . . ." She broke off. "But no. I must not tell you that."

If his lips smiled the crooked half-mocking smile she knew so well, his eyes were grave. "So that now you are to have secrets from me."

"Why no. What does it matter after all? Their highnesses are more mistrustful than usual because there is an emissary from the Assembly secretly in Coblenz at present."

André-Louis' face betrayed nothing. "Secretly?" said he. "A secret of Polichinelle, it seems."

"Hardly that, and, anyway, the emissary believes that no one knows save the Elector with whom he has come to treat."

"And the Elector has betrayed him?"

Aline appeared to be very well informed. "The Elector is in a dilemma. He confided in Monsieur d'Entragues. Monsieur d'Entragues, of course, has told the Prince."

"I don't perceive the need for mystery. Who is the man? Do you know?"

"I believe he is a person of some consequence in the Assembly."

"Naturally, if he comes as an ambassador to the Elector." With assumed idleness he asked: "They intend him no harm I suppose? Messieurs the *émigrés* I mean."

"You do not imagine that they will allow him to depart again. Only M. de Batz is so squeamish as to advocate that. He has reasons of his own."

"Do they know then, where to find this man?"

"Of course. He has been tracked."

André-Louis continued with his air of half-interest. "But what can they do? After all, he is an ambassador. Therefore his person is sacred."

"To the Elector, André. But not to Messieurs the émigrés."

"We are in the Electorate, are we not? What can the émigrés do here?"

Aline's sweet face was solemn. "They will deal with him I suppose, as his kind deals with ours."

"By way of showing that there is no fundamental difference between the two." He laughed to dissemble the depth of his interest and concern. "Well, well! It's a piece of wanton stupidity for which they may pay bitterly, and it's a gross breach of the Elector's hospitality, since it may bring down grave consequences upon him. Do you say, Aline, that the Princes are in this murder business? Or is it just the intention of some reckless hotheads?"

She became alarmed. Although he kept his voice low an undertone of vehemence, of indignation, quivered in it.

"I have talked too freely, André. You have led me on. Forget what I have said."

He dismissed the matter with a careless shrug. "What difference if I remember?"

He was to display that difference the moment she had left him to return to her duties. He quitted the palace on the instant, and rode back into the town at the gallop. Leaving his horse at the stable of the Three Crowns, from which he had hired it, he made his way at speed through the thickening dusk to the little street behind the Liebfraukirche, praying that already he might not come too late.

He had assurance almost as soon as he had entered the street that he was in time, but no more than in time; already the assassins were at their post. At his appearance three shadows melted into the archway of a porte-cochère almost opposite Le Chapelier's lodging.

He reached the door, and knocked with the butt of his riding-whip. This whip was his only weapon, and he blamed himself now for having neglected to arm himself.

The door was opened by the same broad woman whom yesterday he had seen.

"Monsieur . . . The gentleman who is lodged with you? Is he within?"

She scanned him by the light of the lamp in the passage behind her.

"I don't know. But if he is he will receive no visitors."

"Tell him," said André-Louis "that it is the friend who walked home with him last evening. You know me again, don't you?"

"Wait there." She closed the door in his face.

Presently whilst waiting, André-Louis dropped his whip. He stooped to recover it, and was some time about it. This because he was looking between his legs at the porte-cochère behind him. The three heads were there in view peering out, to watch him.

At last he was admitted. In the front room above stairs, Le Chapelier, neat of apparel as a *petit-maitre*, a gold-rimmed spy-glass dangling from a ribbon round his neck smiled a welcome.

"You've come to tell me that you have changed your mind; that you will return with me."

"A bad guess, Isaac. I've come to tell you that there is more than a doubt about your own return."

The tired eyes flamed into alertness, the fine arched brows were raised in surprise. "What's that? The *émigrés*, do you mean?"

"Messieurs the *émigrés*. Three of their assassins—at least three—are at this moment lying in wait for you in the street."

Le Chapelier lost colour. "But how do they know? Have you . . . ?"

"No. I haven't. If I had I should not now be here. Your visit has placed the Elector in a delicate position. Clemens Wenceslaus has a nice sense of hospitality. He found himself between the wall of that and the sword of your demand. In his perplexity he sent for M. d'Entragues and told him of it in confidence. In confidence M. d'Entragues passed on the information to the Princes. In confidence the Princes appear to have told the whole court, and in confidence a member of it told me an hour ago. Has it ever occurred to you, Isaac, that but for confidential communications one would never get at any of the facts of history?"

"And you have come to warn me?"

"Isn't that what you gather?"

"This is very friendly, André." Le Chapelier was gravely emphatic. "But why should you suppose that they intend to murder me?"

"Isn't it what you would suppose, yourself?"

Le Chapelier sat down in the only armchair that plainly-furnished room afforded. He drew a handkerchief from his

pocket and mopped the sweat which had gathered in cold beads upon his brow

"You are taking some risk," he said. "It is noble but in the circumstances, foolish."

"Most noble things are foolish."

"If they are posted there as you say . . ." Le Chapelier shrugged. "Your warning comes too late. But I thank you for it none the less, my friend."

"Nonsense. Is there no back way out of this?"

A wan smile crossed the face of the deputy which showed pale in the candlelight.

"If there were they would be guarding it."

"Very well, then. I'll seek the Elector. He shall send his guards to clear a way for you."

"The Elector has gone to Oberkirch. Before you could reach him and return it would be daylight. Do you imagine that those murderers will wait all night? When they perceive that I am not coming forth again they'll knock. The woman will open, and . . ." He shrugged, and left the sentence there. Then in hot, distressed anger he broke out: "It's an infamy! I am an ambassador, and my person is sacred. But these vindictive devils care nothing for that. In their eyes I am vermin to be exterminated, and they'll exterminate me without a thought for the vengeance they will bring down upon their host the Elector." He got to his feet again, raging. "My God! What a vengeance that will be! This foolish archbishop shall realize the rashness of having harboured such guests."

"That won't slake the thirst you'll have in Hell," said André-Louis. "And, anyway, you're not dead yet."

"Why, no. Merely under sentence."

"Come, man. To be warned is already something. It's the unsuspecting who walks foolishly into the trap. If, now we were to make a sally, both together, the odds are none so heavy. Two against three. We might bring you off."

Hope dawned in Le Chapelier's face. Doubt followed. "Do you know that there are but three? Can you be sure?"

André-Louis sighed "Ah! That, I confess, is my own misgiving."

"Depend upon it, there will be more at hand. Go your way, my friend, while you may still depart. I'll await them here with my pistols. They will not know that I am warned. I may get one of them before they get me."

"A poor consolation." André-Louis stood in thought. Then: "Yes I might go my way," he said. "They've seen me

enter. They will hardly hinder my departure, lest by so doing they should alarm you." His eyes grew bright with inspiration. Abruptly he asked a question. "If you were out of this house, what should you do?"

"Do? I should make for the frontier. My travelling chaise is at the Red Hat." Despondently he added: "But what's that to the matter?"

"Are your papers in order? Could you pass the guard at the bridge?"

"Oh yes. My passport is countersigned by the Electoral Chancellor."

"Why then it's easy I think."

"Easy?"

"We're much of a height and shape. You will take this riding-coat, these white breeches and these boots. With my hat on your head and my whip tucked under your arm the woman of the house will light Monsieur André-Louis Moreau to the door. On the doorstep you will pause, turning your back upon that gateway across the street; so that whilst your figure is clear in the light, your face will not be seen. You will say to the woman something like this: 'You had better tell the gentleman upstairs that if I do not return within an hour he need not wait for me.' Then you plunge abruptly from the light into the gloom and make off, a hand in each pocket, a pistol in each hand for emergencies."

The colour was stirring again in the deputy's pale cheeks. "But you?"

"I?" André-Louis shrugged. "They will let you go because they will suppose that you are not Isaac Le Chapelier. They will let me go because they will see that I am not Isaac Le Chapelier."

The deputy wrung his hands nervously. He was white again. "You tempt me damnably."

André-Louis began to unbutton his coat. "Off with your clothes."

"But the risk to you is more than you represent it."

"It is negligible, and merely a risk. Your death, if you wait, is a certainty. Come, man To work!"

The change was effected, and at least the back view presented by Le Chapelier in André-Louis' clothes must in an uncertain light be indistinguishable from that of the man whom those watching eyes had seen enter the house a half-hour ago.

"Now call your woman. Dab your lips with a handkerchief as you emerge. It will help to mask your face until you've turned."

Le Chapelier gripped both his hands. His myopic eyes were moist. "I have no words my friend."

"Praised be Heaven! Away with you You have an hour in which to be out of Coblenz."

A few minutes later when the door opened, something stirred in the archway across the street. The watching eyes beheld the man in the riding-coat and sugar-loaf hat who had entered a half-hour before. They heard his parting message, loudly spoken, and saw him go striding down the street. They made no move to hinder or to follow.

André-Louis above peering past the edge of the blind his ears attentive, was content.

A full hour he waited, and whilst waiting he considered. What if these gentlemen issued no challenge, made no covert attack, but, persuaded that he was Le Chapelier, shot him as he walked down the street? It was a risk he had not counted. Counting it now, he decided that it would be better to receive them here in the light where face to face they would perceive their error.

Another hour he waited, now sitting, now pacing the length of the narrow chamber in a state of nervousness induced by the suspense, conjecture chasing conjecture through his mind. Then, at long last, towards ten o'clock, a rattle of approaching steps on the kidney stones of the street below a mutter of voices directly under the window announced that the enemy was moving to the assault.

Considering what the odds would be, André-Louis wished that he had pistols. But Le Chapelier had taken the only pair. He fingered the cut steel hilt of the light delicate sword which Le Chapelier had left him; but he did not draw it. A loud knock fell on the door, and was twice repeated.

He heard the shuffling steps of the woman, the click of the lifted latch, her voice raised in challenge, deeper voices answering her, then her voice again in an outcry of alarm, and at last a rush of heavy feet along the passage and upon the stairs.

When the door was flung rudely open, the three men who thrust into the room beheld an apparently calm young gentleman standing beyond the barrier of the table, with brows interrogatively raised, considering them with a glance no more startled than the intrusion warranted.

"What's this?" he asked. "Who are you? What do you want here?"

"We want you, sir," said the foremost under whose half-open cloak André-Louis perceived the green and silver of the guards of

M. d'Artois. He was tall and authoritative, in air and voice a gentleman. The other two wore the blue coats with yellow facings and fleur-de-lys buttons of the Auvergne Regiment.

"You are to come with us, if you please," said green-and-silver.

So! It was not proposed to butcher him on the spot. They were to lead him forth. Down to the river, perhaps. Blow his brains out and thrust his body into the stream. Thus the Deputy Le Chapelier would simply disappear.

"Come with you?" André-Louis echoed the words like a man who has not understood them.

"At once, if you please. You are wanted at the Electoral Palace."

Deeper showed the surprise on André-Louis' face. "At the Electoral Palace? Odd! However, I come, of course." He turned aside to take up hat and cloak. "Faith, you are only just in time. I was about to depart, tired of waiting for Monsieur Le Chapelier." In the act of flinging the cloak about his shoulders, he added: "I suppose that it was he who sent you?"

The question stirred them sharply. The three of them were craning their necks to scrutinize him.

"Who the devil are you?" demanded one of the Auvergnats.

"If it comes to that, who the devil may you be?"

"I've told you, sir," said green-and-silver, "that we are——"

He was interrupted by an oath from one of his companions. "This is not our man."

The colour deepened in green-and-silver's face. He advanced a step. "Where is Le Chapelier?"

"Where is he?" André-Louis looked blank. "Where is he?" he repeated. "Then he hasn't sent you?"

"I tell you we are seeking him."

"But if you come from the Electoral Palace, then? It is very odd." André-Louis assumed an air of mistrust. "Le Chapelier left me two hours ago to go there. He was to have returned in an hour. If you want him, you had better wait here for him. I can wait no longer."

"Two hours ago!" the Auvergnat was saying. "Then it was the man who——"

Green-and-silver cut sharply across the question which must betray the watch they had kept. "How long have you been here?"

"Three hours at least."

"Ah!" Green-and-silver was concluding that the man in the riding-coat whom they had supposed a visitor must have been

the deputy himself. It was bewildering. "Who are you?" he asked aggressively. "What was your business with the deputy?"

"Faith! I don't know what concern that may be of yours. But there's no secret. I had no business with him. He's an old friend met here by chance, that's all. As to whom I am, I am named André-Louis Moreau."

"What? You are Kercadiou's bastard?"

The next moment green-and-silver received André-Louis' hand full and hard upon his cheek. There was a twisted smile on André-Louis' white face.

"To-morrow," said he coldly, "there will be one liar the less in the world. To-night if honour spurs you fiercely."

The officer, white in his turn, his lip in his teeth, bowed formally. The other two stood at gaze, startled. The entire scene and their respective rôles in it had abruptly changed.

"To-morrow will serve," said the officer, and added: "My name is Tourzel, Clement de Tourzel."

"Your friends will know where to find me. I am lodged at the Three Crowns with my godfather—my godfather, gentlemen, be good enough to remember—Monsieur de Kercadiou."

His glance for a moment challenged the two Auvergnats. Then, finding the challenge unanswered, he flung one wing of the cloak over his left shoulder and stalked past them, out of the room, down the stairs and so out of the house.

The officers made no attempt to detain him. The Auvergnats stared gloomily at green-and-silver.

"Here's a nice blunder," said one of them.

"You fool, Tourzel!" cried the other. "You're a dead man."

"Peste!" swore Tourzel. "The words slipped out of me before I knew what I was saying."

"And it must be a lie, anyway," said the first. "Does anyone suppose that Kercadiou would allow his bastard to marry his niece?"

Tourzel shrugged and attempted a laugh of bravado. "We'll leave to-morrow till it dawn. Meanwhile we have this rat of a patriot to settle to-night. It will be better after all to await him in the street."

Meanwhile André-Louis was walking briskly back to the Three Crowns.

"You are late, André," his godfather greeted him. Then, as André-Louis loosed his cloak, and the Lord of Gavrilac perceived his black satin breeches and buckled shoes, "Parbleau! You're neat," he said.

"In all my undertakings," answered André-Louis.

CHAPTER VI

THE APOLOGY

IN the course of the following morning, as André-Louis sat expecting Monsieur de Tourzel's friends, he was visited by an equerry with a command to wait instantly upon Monsieur at Schönbornlust. The carriage which had brought the equerry waited at the door of the inn. The matter had almost the air of an arrest.

André-Louis who had no taste for wearing another man's clothes longer than he must, and who was spurred in addition on this occasion by less personal considerations, had sought a tailor early that morning, and was once more characteristically arrayed in a long fawn riding-coat with wide lapels. He professed himself ready, and took leave of the Lord of Gavrilac, who suffering from a chill, was constrained to keep the house.

At Schönbornlust he was received in the ante-chamber, almost empty at this early hour, by the swarthy, hollow-cheeked Monsieur d'Entragues, whose narrow close-set eyes looked him over coldly. André-Louis', of course, was not a proper dress in which to come to court, and was of a kind tolerated there only because the impecunious state of many of the émigrés had perforce relaxed the etiquette in these matters.

Monsieur d'Entragues surprised him with questions on the subject of his relations with Le Chapelier. André-Louis made no mystery. Le Chapelier and he had been friends, and at various times associates, from the days of the Assembly of the States of Brittany at Rennes, five or six years ago. He had met him by chance in the street two evenings ago, and last night he had called at Le Chapelier's lodging to pay him a friendly visit.

"And then?" quoth Monsieur d'Entragues, peremptory.

"And then? Oh, when I had been with him an hour or so, he informed me that he was expected at the Electoral Palace, and begged me to await his return, saying that he would not be more than an hour away. I waited two hours, and then, when a Monsieur de Tourzel and two other gentlemen called to see him, I departed."

M. d'Entragues' dark eyes had shifted from André-Louis, "It is all very odd."

"Very odd, indeed, to leave me waiting there like that."

"Especially as he can have had no intention of returning."

"But what do you tell me?"

"This man Le Chapelier left his lodging at nine o'clock."

"Yes. That would be the time."

"At a quarter past nine he was at the Red Hat Inn, where he kept his travelling chaise. At half-past nine the guard at the bridge passed him over. He was on his way to France. Clearly he must have been acting upon intentions formed before he left you, as you tell me, to await his return."

"It must have been so if your information is correct. It is very odd, as you say."

"You did not know that he would not return?" d'Entragues' eyes were like gimlets

André-Louis met their searching glance with a crooked smile.

"Oh, but I am honoured. You take me for a half-wit. I sit for two hours awaiting the return of a man who I know will not return. Ah, but that is droll." And he laughed outright.

M. d'Entragues did not join in the laugh. "If you intended, for instance, to cover his retreat?"

"His retreat?" André-Louis was suddenly grave again. "His retreat? But from what then, was he retreating? Was he threatened? Peste, Monsieur d'Entragues, you'll not mean that the visit of Monsieur de Tourzel and his friends——"

"Bah!" snapped d'Entragues to interrupt him. "What are you assuming?" There was a flush on his dark face. He was uncomfortably conscious that his zeal of investigation had half betrayed a design which having failed in execution, must never now be known.

But André-Louis, maliciously vindictive, pursued him. "It is you, monsieur, who make assumptions, I think. If you assume that I stayed to cover a retreat, you must know that there was cause for it. That is plain enough."

"I know nothing of the kind, sir. I only fear lest Monsieur Le Chapelier should have suspected some danger, and so have been led to make a departure which looks like a flight. Naturally Monsieur Le Chapelier as an agent of these revolutionaries would know that here he has only enemies, and this may have made him start at shadows. Enough, sir! I'll conduct you to his highness."

In a small room communicating with the white-and-gold pillared salon that served as presence chamber, the King's brother was seated quill in hand at a table strewn with papers. He was attended by the Comte d'Avaray, his favourite, a slight, pale, delicate-looking man of thirty, with thin fair hair, who in appearance, dress and manner affected the airs of an Englishman. He was a protégé of Madame de Balbi, to whom he owed a position which his own talents had very materially strengthened.

Devoted to Monsieur, it was his wit and resource which had made possible the Prince's timely escape from Paris. Gentle, courteous and affable, he had earned the esteem of the entire court if we except the ambitious Monsieur d'Entragues, who beheld in him a dangerous rival for Monsieur's favour.

His highness slewed himself half round in his chair to confront André-Louis. André-Louis bowed profoundly. The Comte d'Entragues remained watchful in the background.

"Ah, Monsieur Moreau." There was a smile on Monsieur's full lips, but his prominent eyes under their heavy arched brows were hardly friendly. "Considering your services to some persons we esteem, I must deplore that my brother, M. d'Artois, should have found your opinions and principles of such a complexion that he has not been able to offer you any post in the army which is about to deliver Throne and Altar from the enemy."

He paused there, and André-Louis felt it incumbent upon him to say something in reply.

"Perhaps I did not make it sufficiently clear to his highness that my principles are strictly monarchical, monseigneur."

"Strictly perhaps, but inadequately. You are, I understand a constitutionalist. That, however, is by the way." He paused a moment. "What was that officer's name d'Entragues?"

"Tourzel, monseigneur. Captain Clement de Tourzel."

"Ah, yes. Tourzel. I understand, Monsieur Moreau that you had the misfortune to enter into a quarrel last night with Captain de Tourzel."

"Captain de Tourzel had that misfortune monseigneur."

The great eyes bulged at him. Monsieur d'Avaray looked startled. D'Entragues in the background clicked softly with his tongue.

"To be sure, you have been a fencing-master," said Monsieur. "A fencing-master of considerable repute, I understand." His tone was cold and distant. "Do you think, Monsieur Moreau, that it is quite proper, quite honourable for a fencing-master to engage in duels? Is it not a little like . . . like gaming with clogged dice?"

"That circumstance, monseigneur, should prevent unpardonable utterances. A fencing-master is not to be insulted with impunity because he is a fencing-master."

"But I understand, sir that you were the aggressor: that you struck Monsieur de Tourzel. That is so, d'Entragues, is it not? A blow was struck?"

André-Louis saved the Count the trouble of answering. 'I

certainly struck Monsieur de Tourzel. But the blow was not the aggression. It was the answer to an insult that admitted of no other answer."

"Is this so, d'Entragues?" His highness became peevish. "You did not tell me this, d'Entragues."

"Naturally, monseigneur, there must have been some provocation for the blow."

"Then why am I not told? Why am I but half informed? Monsieur Moreau, what was this provocation?"

André-Louis told him, adding: "It is a lie, monseigneur, that peculiarly defames my godfather since I am to marry his niece. I could not let it pass even if I am a fencing-master."

Monsieur breathed noisily. He showed signs of discomfort of distress. "But this is very grave, d'Entragues. Almost . . . almost it touches the honour of Mademoiselle de Kercadiou." It annoyed André-Louis that his highness should make this the reason for his change of attitude. "You agree that it is grave, d'Entragues?"

"Most grave, monseigneur."

Did this lantern-jawed fellow smile covertly, wondered André-Louis in suppressed fury.

"You will say two words from me to this Captain de Tourzel. You will tell him that I am not pleased with him. That I censure his conduct in the severest terms. That I regard it as disgraceful in a gentleman. Tell him this from me, d'Entragues; and see that he does not approach us again for at least a month."

He turned once more to André-Louis. "He shall make you an apology, Monsieur Moreau. Let him know that, too, d'Entragues: that he must formally retract to Monsieur Moreau, and this at once. You understand, Monsieur Moreau, that this matter can go no further. For one thing, there is an edict in the Electorate against duelling and we who are the Elector's guests must scrupulously respect his laws. For another, the time is not one in which it consorts with honour that gentlemen should engage in private quarrels. The King needs—urgently needs—every blade in his own cause. You understand, sir?"

André-Louis bowed. "Perfectly, monseigneur."

"Then that is all, I think. I thank you for your attention. You may retire, Monsieur Moreau." The plump white hand waved him away, the heavy lips parted in a cold half-smile.

In the ante-chamber Monsieur Moreau was desired to wait until Monsieur d'Entragues should have found Captain de Tourzel.

It was whilst he was cooling his heels there, the only tenant

of that spacious, sparsely-furnished hall, that Aline, accompanied by Madame de Plougastel, entered by the folding doors from the salon. He started towards them.

"Aline !"

But her expression checked his eagerness. There was a pallor about the lower half of her face, a little pucker between the fine brows, a general look of hurt sternness.

"Oh, how could you ? How could you ?"

"How could I what ?"

"Break faith with me so. Betray what I told you in secret !"

He understood, and was not abashed. "It was to save a man's life : the life of a friend. Chapelier was my friend "

"But you did not know that when you drew from me the confidence."

"I did. I knew that Le Chapelier was in Coblenz, and, therefore, that he must be the man concerned."

"You knew ? You knew ?" She looked at him in deepening anger. Behind her stood Madame de Plougastel, sad-eyed after her little smile of greeting. "And you said nothing of your knowledge. You led me on to talk. You drew it all from me with pretended indifference. That was sly, André. Horribly sly. I'd not have believed it of you."

André-Louis was almost impatient. "Will you tell me what harm is done ? Or do you tell me that you are angry because a man, a friend of mine, has not been assassinated ?"

"That is not the point."

"It is very much the point."

Madame de Plougastel sought to make peace. "Indeed, Aline, if it was a friend of André's——"

But Aline interrupted her. "That is not the point at all, madame, between André and me. Why was he not frank ? Why did he use me so slyly, luring me into betraying a confidence Monsieur had reposed in me, using me as if . . . as if I were a spy."

"Aline !"

"Did you do less ? Will it appear less when it becomes known that this man, this dangerous agent of your revolutionary friends, made his escape because I betrayed the intentions concerning him ?"

"It will never become known," said André-Louis. "I've talked to Monsieur d'Entragues. I've stopped his questions. His mind is satisfied."

"There, Aline. You see," said Madame de Plougastel. "All is well, after all."

"All is very far from well. How can there be any confidence between us after this? I must keep a guard upon my tongue. How can I be sure when I talk to André whether I am talking to my lover or to a revolutionary agent? If Monsieur knew what would he think of me?"

"That of course, is important," said André-Louis, unable now to repress his irony.

"Do you sneer? Certainly it is important. If Monsieur honours me with his confidence, am I to betray it? I am to appear in his eyes either as a traitress or a little fool who cannot set a guard upon her tongue. A pleasant choice. This man has escaped. He has gone back to Paris to work evil against the Princes, against the King."

"It comes to this then: that you are sorry he was not assassinated."

Being true, and yet not the whole truth, his put her further out of patience.

"It is not true that he was to have been assassinated. And if it were that is but the effect, and I am dealing with the cause. Why will you confuse them?"

"Because they are always inseparable. Cause and effect are but the two sides of a fact. And in justice to me remember that he was my friend."

"You mean that you think more of him than you do of me," she said with feminine perversity. "For his sake you lied to me; for your silence amounted to no less. You duped me, tricked me by your seemingly idle questions and your false air of indifference. You are too clever for me, André."

"I wish that I were clever enough to make you see the folly of all this."

Madame de Plougastel put a hand on her shoulder. "Aline my dear can you find no excuse for him?"

"Can you madame?"

"Why every excuse since hearing that this man was his friend. I would not have had him behave otherwise. Neither should you."

"It was not upon you he exercised his slyness, madame, or you might think differently. Nor is that all, as you know. What is this of a duel on your hands, André?"

"Oh that!" André-Louis was airy, welcoming the change of subject. "That arranges itself."

"Arranges itself! You've ruined yourself completely with Monsieur."

"There at least, I can prove you wrong. I've seen Monsieur.

His highness is tolerably pleased with me. It is my opponent who is out of favour."

"You ask me to believe this?"

"You may ascertain it for yourself. Monsieur pays attention to facts; permits a connection between cause and effect which you deny. When I had told him why I smacked M. de Tourzel's face he gave me reason. Monsieur de Tourzel is to apologize to me. I am waiting for him now."

"Monsieur de Tourzel is to apologize to you because you smacked his face?"

"No, my sweet perversity. But for the reason he gave me to do it."

"What reason?"

He told them, and saw distress in both their faces. "Monsieur," he added, "does not consider that a buffet suffices to extinguish the offence. That may be out of tenderness for you, because he perceived, as he said, that in a sense it touched your honour."

He saw her eyes soften at last, and winced to see it, accounting it the reflection of her gratitude to Monsieur. "That was gracious of his highness. You see, André, how gracious, how generous he can be."

Monsieur d'Entragues came in accompanied by Monsieur de Tourzel. André-Louis looked over his shoulder at them.

"I am wanted. Shall I see you again before I go, Aline?"

She had resumed her coldness. "Not to-day, André. I must consider all this. I am shaken. Hurt."

Madame de Plougastel leaned towards him. "Leave me to make your peace, André."

He kissed her hand, and then Aline's, which was very coldly yielded. Then, having held the door for them, he turned to meet the newcomers.

The tall, offending young officer was looking pale and vicious. No doubt he had received the messages intimating Monsieur's displeasure, and he saw his advancement imperilled by the events. He came stiffly to attention before André-Louis, and bowed formally. André-Louis returned the bow as formally.

"I am commanded by Monsieur to retract the words I used to you last night, sir, and to apologize for them."

André-Louis disliked the studiously offensive tone.

"I am commanded by Monsieur to accept the apology. I gather that we make this exchange of civilities with mutual regret."

"Certainly with regret on my side," said the officer.

'You may temper it, then, with the reflection that once your duty to his majesty no longer claims your sword, you may call upon me for anything that you may conceive I owe you.'

Only Monsieur d'Enragues' intervention at that moment saved Captain de Tourzel's countenance.

"Messieurs what is this? Will you build a new quarrel out of the old one? There is no more to be said between you. This affair must go no further, nor must it be resumed under pain of Monsieur's severe displeasure. You understand me, gentlemen?"

They bowed and separated and André-Louis went back to his inn in an indifferent humour.

CHAPTER VII

MADAME DE BALBI

At long last the great Prussian and Austrian legions, reinforced by the chivalry of France, were moving forward. Longwy was being invested and the campaign for Throne and Altar was beginning in earnest, just one month later than it should have begun but for the vagaries of the King of Prussia the Agamemnon of this invading host.

A month ago, when all was ready and the weather fine, this Prussian giant had descended upon Coblenz and upon Charles William of Brunswick-Wolfenbüttel, who was the real commander-in-chief and a soldier of repute. Suspending all effective movement, his Majesty had wasted precious time upon reviews, parades and fêtes to celebrate a victory which had yet to be won.

The brothers of the King of France possessing no greater military acumen than his majesty of Prussia were content enough to co-operate in these junketings, and to waste upon them large sums of the borrowed money which already was running woefully short. Condé, the only soldier among the Princes, fretted the while in his camp at Worms over a delay that was all in favour of the unready enemy, and grumbled—not without reason—that an invisible hand withheld them perilously from attempting an assured success.

Now, at last, all delays were ended ; now that the rains had converted the Rhineland into a world of mud. The Princes were at once to rejoin the army of the émigrés, and make a pretence at least of commanding it, under the mentorship of Condé and the Maréchal de Broglie. Their ladies—that is to say, the wife of one of them and the mistresses of both—were to leave Coblenz at once.

Madame was to repair to her father's court at Turin. But because the King of Sardinia had already experienced the prodigality of his sons-in-law (for each of the sons of France had married a princess of Savoy) he strictly delimited the suite that was to attend her highness. Some ladies-in-waiting, however, she must have, and to Madame de Balbi and Madame de Gourbillon she would have added Mademoiselle de Kercadiou but for certain activities on the part of Madame de Balbi, activities which—so badly do we sometimes blunder when we seek to shape our destinies—were to precipitate in the end the very situation which with such clear reckoning they were calculated to avert.

An Electoral carriage brought Madame de Balbi, in the pursuit of these activities, one afternoon to the door of the Three Crowns.

Now it happened that Monsieur de Kercadiou, complaining of the cold and damp and of a general weariness resulting from his condition, had put himself to bed, and André-Louis was sitting alone over a book when a footman, ushered by a waiting-maid, brought the startling announcement of Madame la Comtesse de Balbi's presence.

In bewildered conjecture André-Louis consented to act as his godfather's deputy, and desired that the Countess be brought up.

She came, throwing back her gossamer light cloak and wimple, and her presence and personality seemed to bring a radiance into that long, low-ceilinged room. Her crisp, melodious tones offered apologies for her intrusion and regrets for the condition and absence of Monsieur de Kercadiou.

"But the matter is almost more personal to yourself than to your godfather, Monsieur Moreau."

"I am honoured by your memory, madame," said André-Louis, surprised to hear his name so glibly from her lips. He bowed as he spoke, and offered her the armchair by the stove which Monsieur de Kercadiou had lately vacated.

She laughed as she advanced to take it, a rich musical laugh that reminded one of the note of a thrush.

"I suspect you guilty of modesty, Monsieur Moreau."

"You account it a guilt madame?"

"Of course since it fetters expression." She sat down, and arranged her skirts

Anne de Caumont-La Force, unhappily married to that eccentric libertine Count de Balbi, who had brutally ill-treated her before he went mad and fortunately died, might from her appearance have been of any age from twenty-five to thirty-five. In reality she was already forty. She was small and elegantly dainty. Not beautiful in spite of a pair of superb eyes, alluring in their glances, but endowed with an irresistible witchery to which all her contemporaries bear witness.

The glance of those magnificent dark eyes seemed now to envelop André-Louis, to challenge him almost to woo him

"I had remarked you at Schönbornlust monsieur, on the day of your arrival, and I remarked you let me say frankly with admiration for your superb aplomb I know no quality that better becomes a gentleman."

He would have answered her but the sparkling, voluble lady gave him no time. She swept on. "It is really on your account that I am here and as a result of the interest you inspire in me. Ah, but reassure yourself, Monsieur Moreau, I am not one of those greedy women who must find their every interest reciprocated and desire in addition to arouse interest which they cannot reciprocate"

"I should not crave reassurance, madame from an amiable illusion."

You turn a phrase, Monsieur Moreau. But, indeed, it was to be expected in you. You have been an author I am told."

"I have been so many things, madame."

"And now you are the greatest thing of all: a lover. Ah believe one who knows. No man can aspire to more, for it brings him nearer Heaven than is otherwise possible on earth."

"Your lovers, madame, will have discovered that"

"My lovers! Ah, that! You speak as if I measured them by the bushel."

"It will ever rest with you, madame, how you measure them."

"Oh, I cry you mercy. This is a duel in which I risk defeat." She was as grave as her roguish eye and the tilt of her nose permitted. "It is to the lover that I have come to speak. For this is even more his affair than it is an uncle's. Therefore, we may leave Monsieur de Kercadiou in peace. Besides, it is not very easy to say what I have come to say, and it may be less difficult to say it to you alone. You will prove as understanding as I hope you will prove discreet"

"Discreet as a confessor, be sure of that Madame," said André-Louis, inwardly a little impatient.

The Countess considered a moment, her perfect hands smoothing her petticoat of striped taffeta the while.

"When I shall have told you my errand you will be in danger of supposing me just a jealous woman. I warn you against it. I have much for which to answer. But jealousy is a vulgarity which I leave to the vulgar."

"It is inconceivable madame, that you should ever have had occasion for it."

She flashed him a smile "That may be the reason. Remember it when you come to judge me I am to speak, sir, of the lady whom I am told you are to marry Frankly, it is not on her own account that her fate concerns me, but because of the . . . let us say regard . . . which you, monsieur, inspire me."

André-Louis was stirred "Her fate madame? Is she then, in danger?"

She shrugged, thrust out a full sensual nether lip, and showed two dimples in a smile "Some would not account it danger. It depends upon the point of view. In your eyes, Monsieur Moreau she certainly cannot be accounted safe. Do you even suspect at whose desire she was appointed lady-in-waiting to Madame?"

"You will tell me that it was at Monsieur's," he replied frowning

She shook her head "It was at the desire of Madame herself."

He was suddenly at a loss "But in that case, madame . . ." He broke off

"In that case you imagine that there is no more to say. You do not think it may be necessary to discover Madame's object. You assume it naturally to be a sympathy for that very charming person Mademoiselle de Kercadiou. That is because you do not know Madame. Mademoiselle de Kercadiou is singularly attractive. There is about her an air of sweetness, of freshness, of innocence that arouses tenderness even in women. What, then must it do in men? So far, for instance, as Monsieur is concerned, I have seldom seen his highness in such a state of deliquescence." There was something contemptuous in her smile, as if she found the susceptible side of Monsieur's nature entirely ridiculous. "Disabuse your mind of the thought that jealousy makes me see what is not present. The Count of Provence might trail a seraglio at his heels without perturbing me."

"But you bewilder me, madame. Am I to believe that because Monsieur . . . discovered attractions in Mademoiselle de Kercadiou that is a reason why Madame should appoint her to a position that will throw her in his way? Surely not that?"

"Just that, monsieur. Just that. Madame's nature is peculiar; it is warped, soured, malicious. For the satisfaction of contemplating injury to another she will endure even injury to herself. It happens with such natures. I have the distinction of being detested by Madame. This is all the more bitter in her because she is constrained to suffer my attendance and to be civil to me. Now do you understand?"

André-Louis was visibly troubled "I seem to And yet . . ."

"Madame would give her eyes to see me supplanted in the regard, the affection of Monsieur. Does that help you?"

"You mean that to achieve this object, although the exchange can nothing profit her her highness desires to use Mademoiselle de Kercadiou?"

"That is as concise as it is accurate."

"It is also infamous."

The Countess shrugged. "I should not use so fine a word. It is just the petty malice of a stupid, parasitic woman who is without useful thoughts to engage her."

"I perceive your good intentions, madame" André-Louis was very formal. "You desire to warn me I am deeply grateful."

"The warning, my friend is hardly uttered yet. Madame sets out to-morrow for Turin. I am to accompany her highness. My position at court demands it I beg that you will not laugh, Monsieur Moreau."

"I am not laughing, madame."

"You have great self-restraint. I had already observed it." The dimples showed again in her cheeks. Then she swept on: "Madame's train has been reduced to vanishing point by the King of Sardinia, who looks upon us as locusts. Her only ladies besides myself were to be the Duchess of Caylus and Madame de Gourbillon. But now, at the last moment her highness has insisted that Mademoiselle de Kercadiou be added. Do you perceive the aim and what must follow? If she leaves Mademoiselle de Kercadiou in Coblenz, that may well be the last that she will ever see of her. You may be married you two, or other circumstances may arise to prevent her from ever returning to court. But if Mademoiselle remains at her side, in a month—in two months at most—when this campaign is ended,

we shall be back at Versailles, and your Aline will again be dangled before Monsieur, whose heart may have grown fonder in the absence. You understand me, I think, Monsieur Moreau."

"Oh, perfectly, madame." His tone was stern and not without a touch of reproof. "Even that in your calculations you leave out of all account Mademoiselle de Kercadiou's strength of character and virtue."

The Countess de Balbi shrugged, pursed her full lips and smiled

"Yes. You have the fine spirit of a lover: to regard the virtue of his mistress as a rock. But I, who am a mere woman, and who, therefore, know women, who have lived a little longer than you, and who have spent this life of mine in courts, I tell you that it is imprudent to ground your faith on nothing more. Virtue, when all is said, is an idea. And ideas are governed by environment. The environment of a court plays havoc with virtue, my friend. Accept my word for it. You know, at least, that nothing will so quickly wilt a woman's reputation as the attentions of a prince. There is a glamour about the office which no cloddishness in the holder can completely extinguish. Princes in a woman's eyes are heirs to all the romance of the ages, even when they are as unromantic in themselves as our poor King Louis."

"You tell me nothing that I do not know madame."

"Ah, true!" her irony flashed out again. "I had almost forgotten that you are a republican."

"Not so. I am a constitutional monarchist."

"Faith, that's accounted even worse here at Coblenz." She rose abruptly. "I have said all that I came to say. The rest is for you."

"And for Mademoiselle de Kercadiou."

She looked at him, and shook her head. She set a dainty hand upon his arm. Her smile broke dazzlingly upon her roguish face. "Are you so much the gentle, serving, docile lover? This will not answer. A woman needs to be ordered by the man to whom she has given the right. If you cannot prevent Mademoiselle de Kercadiou from going to Turin, why, faith, you do not deserve to win her, and you were better not to do so."

André-Louis considered her gravely. "I do not think that I am very clever with women, madame," he confessed, and so far as I can discover it is the only lack of cleverness to which he ever did confess.

"You'll lack experience. Indeed, you have the air of it."

She drew still nearer to him. Her superb eyes glowed upon him, magnetically disturbing. "Do you reserve for men all your audacity? Your enterprise?"

He laughed, ill at ease, bewildered, almost struggling with an odd intoxication.

She sighed. "Why, yes. I fear you do. Well, well! Time may instruct you better. You shall be remembered in my prayers, Monsieur Moreau."

She held out her hand to him. He took it and bent to kiss it. Almost, he says—which is fantastic—he was conscious of a response in it to the pressure of his lips.

"Madame," he murmured, "you leave me conscious of an obligation."

"Repay me by your friendship, monsieur. Think kindly of Anne de Balbi, if only because she thinks kindly of you."

She rustled out, flashed him a last smile as he held the door, and was gone, leaving him deeply perturbed and thoughtful.

Her judgment of him had been quite accurate, he knew. Masterful in all else, he had no masterfulness in love. And this because in love he saw no place for mastery. Love was not a thing to be snatched, constrained, compelled. To be worth possessing it must be freely given.

Intensely practical in all else, in love he was entirely idealistic. How could he assume the master's tone, the overseer's whip, and command where he desired to worship? He could pray and plead. But if Aline should desire to go to Turin—and he could well understand her wish to see the world—upon what grounds was he to plead with her against it? What grounds existed? Had he so little faith in her that he must suppose her unable to withstand temptation? And what, after all, was the temptation? He smiled at the mental picture of the Comte de Provence as a wooer. To Aline in such a guise the Prince could only be ridiculous.

In his utter trust in Aline, André-Louis would have found peace, but for another thought that assailed him. However Aline might be proof against temptation, he could not endure the thought of her being subjected to the pain and annoyance of an amorous persecution. Because of this possibility he must oppose her journey to Turin. Since he could not hope to succeed by prayers and pleas which would appear to be merely selfish and unreasonable he would have recourse to Scaramouche's weapons of intrigue.

He sought his godfather, and stood by the bedside.

"You are desperately ill, sir," he informed him.

The great night-capped head was agitated on its pillows; alarm dawned in the eyes. "What do you tell me, André?"

"What we must both tell Aline. I have just learnt that it is Madame's intention to bear her off in her train to Turin. I know of no other way to oppose her going save by arousing her concern for you. Therefore be good enough to become very ill indeed."

The greying eyebrows came together. "To Turin. Ah! And you do not wish her to go?"

"Do you, monsieur?"

Monsieur de Kercadiou hesitated. The notion of parting with Aline was a little desolating. It would leave him very lonely in this exile amid his makeshift surroundings. But Monsieur de Kercadiou's life had been spent in preferring the wishes of others to his own.

"If it should be her desire . . . life here would be so dull for the child."

"But infinitely healthier, monsieur." André-Louis spoke of the perilous frivolity of court-life. If Madame de Plougastel had also been in Madame's train, things would have been different. But in the circumstances Aline would be utterly alone. Her very inexperience would render her vulnerable to the vexations that lie in wait for a young lady of her attractions. And it was possible that however eager she might now be at the prospect, once she found herself away from them in distant Savoy, she might be unhappy and they would not be at hand to avail her.

Monsieur de Kercadiou sat up in bed, and gave him reason. Thus it fell out that when Aline arrived a little later she found two conspirators awaiting her.

André-Louis received her in the living-room. It was their first meeting since that sub-acid parting at Schönbornlust.

"I am so glad you have come, Aline. Monsieur de Kercadiou is not well at all. His condition gives me anxiety. It is fortunate that you are about to be relieved of your duties with Madame, for your uncle requires more attention than can be expected from strangers or than a clumsy fellow like myself is able to supply."

He saw the dismay that overspread her face, and guessed that it sprang from more than concern for her uncle, however deep this might be in her tender heart. Her resolve to continue on her dignity with André-Louis was blotted out.

"I was to have accompanied Madame to Turin," she said, in tones of deepest disappointment.

His heart leapt at the tense she already used.

"It's an ill wind that blows no good at all," said he gently "You will be saved the discomforts of a tedious journey."

"Tedious! Oh, André!"

He feigned astonishment. "You do not think it would be tedious? Oh, but I assure you that it would be. And then the court of Turin! It is notoriously drab and dull. My dear, you have had a near escape. You are fortunate to be provided with so sound a reason for begging Madame to excuse you. Come and see Monsieur de Kercadiou, and tell me if you think a doctor should be summoned."

Thus he swept her away, the matter settled without discussion. Monsieur de Kercadiou, a bad actor and a little shamefaced, played his part none too well. He feared unnecessarily to alarm his niece, and she would have departed entirely reassured but for André-Louis.

"It is necessary," he said, when they were outside the invalid's door, "to persuade him that he is none so ill. He must not be alarmed. I have done my best, as you see. But I certainly think that we must have a doctor to him, and I shall be glad when you are here, Aline. So will he, I know, although he would be the last to let you suspect it."

And so there was no further mention of Turin. In her anxiety on Monsieur de Kercadiou's behalf, Aline did not even await Madame's departure to come and instal herself at the Three Crowns. If Madame did not dissemble her vexation, at least she could not withhold the leave which was sought upon such dutiful grounds.

André-Louis congratulated himself upon a victory cheaply bought. Neither he nor Madame de Balbi who had inspired it was to guess how the battle of Valmy and its sequel were to falsify their every calculation.

CHAPTER VIII

VALMY

THE army of twenty-five thousand émigrés grew impatient with the dwindling of restricted resources, the greater part of which had been laid out on handsome uniforms, fine horses and other

equipment to render them dazzling on parade. The Princes had taken their place at the head of these glittering troops, a matter of considerable distress to Monsieur, who, of sedentary habits, detested all form of physical exertion. Destiny, however, had cast him for a definite part and that part he must play, however much Nature, indifferent to Destiny's requirements, might have denied him the necessary endowments.

In the rear of this fine host came the long train of lumbering army wagons and among these two great wooden structures on wheels which contained the Princes' mint, the printing press for the manufacture of the false assignats which already were flooding and distressing Europe. Monsieur solemnly promised that the King of France would honour this paper currency. He had also promised that it should not be put into circulation until France was reached. But this promise had not been kept; and by his foreign hosts and allies Monsieur was at last to be constrained to abandon this facile method of supplementing the dwindling millions he had borrowed.

Side by side with the émigrés marched the Prussian and Austrian armies. The émigrés fondly believed that these legions marched solely to liberate the King, to purge France of anarchy and restore her to her rightful owners; marched, in fact—in that phrase which had been coined in Coblenz—to the deliverance of Throne and Altar. Fatuous assumptions, these, of men who believed themselves to be the elect of Europe in whose service humanity was ready altruistically to immolate her children. They had not heard the Austrian Emperor's epigram when invoked to rescue Marie Antoinette: "It is true that I have a sister in France; but France is not my sister." Austria had produced too many archduchesses to be deeply perturbed about the fate of one of them, even although this one should have become Queen of France. What really interested Austria was that Lorraine had once belonged to her princes and might now be re-possessioned, just as Prussia was intent upon the annexation of Franche-Comté. Here was an excellent opportunity for both to readjust the accounts which had been disturbed by that megalomaniac Louis XIV when he ravaged the Palatinate.

Of this, however, nothing was yet said, and there was as yet no suspicion in émigré breasts that the aims of their allies were not identical with their own. But there were signs. The King of Prussia doomed the Princes to nullity in the command. They and their followers were to be observers rather than auxiliaries. One of the things they observed was that in a measure as the armies advanced, the Austrians planted their black and-yellow

frontier posts surmounted by the double-headed Austrian eagle

Longwy was taken, and the Prussians thrust upon Verdun devouring the contents of every village on their way and then setting them on fire, in fulfilment of the threat in the Duke of Brunswick's manifesto against all those who ventured to resist the invasion

The Princes had assured their allies that once they were upon French soil, the French masses emancipated by their presence from the fear of the revolutionaries would make haste to range themselves on the side of Throne and Altar.

If the inclination existed at all the conduct of the Prussians did not foster it

On the 30th August they were before Verdun, which they occupied after a short bombardment and the road to Paris lay now open before them

News of this reaching Paris two days later produced the September massacres

La Fayette was gone. He perceived that constitutionalism was ended, that an attainder of treason awaited him, and that nothing remained for him but to depart. He crossed the frontier, intending by way of Holland to reach the United States. But he fell into enemy hands and against all the usages of nations was to suffer years of miserable imprisonment.

Dumouriez was sent to replace him, and to oppose to the steady magnificent troops of Austria and Prussia, to the fine flower of French chivalry and three hundred guns, a ragged host barely twenty-five thousand strong, ill-armed, untrained and undisciplined, supported by forty pieces of ordnance

That futile inter-cannonade ensued which is magniloquently known as the Battle of Valmy, in which there were three hundred French, and less than two hundred allied casualties. A mysterious affair which profoundly puzzled Bonaparte later. Incomprehensibly it marked the end of the invasion. The Prussians who had depended upon living on the country were almost entirely without food, they were knee-deep in mud and ravaged by dysentery attributed to the chalky water. The rain continued to distress them. The horizon was black.

Brunswick advised retreat. The King of Prussia as well as the émigrés, who were now desperate, opposed him. They wanted to risk a battle with the object of seizing Chalons. But Brunswick objected that they would be setting too much upon the board in such a gamble. He argued that a defeat would mean the loss of the entire army and that upon his army depended the fate of the Prussian monarchy.

His Majesty was persuaded, and on the thirtieth of September began the dreadful retreat of that great host, attended by rain mud famine and dysentery.

To the émigrés, as you may read in the *mémoires* which some of them have left, this abrupt eclipse of their confident hopes almost without a real battle having been fought, represented the end of the world and was a thing inexplicable. Unanimously, almost in these *mémoires* they declare themselves bought and sold betrayed by their allies or else that Brunswick was a Freemason and the march on Paris had been forbidden him by the lodges. The first part of the accusation may be true. For it is a fact that on his return to Germany the debt-ridden Duke of Brunswick paid out eight millions to his creditors. If Bonaparte had known this the victory of Valmy might have been less of a mystery to him.

The exhausted army struggled back through lands that avenged the ravages they had suffered. They could offer now no sustenance to the starving ravagers. Men and horses dropped exhausted in their tracks and lay to die where they fell or to be massacred by the peasants who constantly harassed them, thirsting to repay the destroyers of their homesteads. And for the émigrés as they toiled fainting through the white glutinous mud of Champagne the peasants were not the only enemies to be feared. The very Prussians starving like themselves turned upon them to pillage their baggage destroying as is the way of pillagers what they could not carry off. And there were women and children with the émigrés, families which had followed the army in carriages so confident that they were going home. Now these delicate ladies cumbered the retreat of that routed host, shared the hardships and suffered indignities unspeakable which did not end even at the Rhine. For having crossed it, they now found themselves contemptuously in prey to the rapacity of the Germans, who took every advantage of their misfortune to strip them by fraud if not by violence of what little they might yet possess.

The dreadful news was borne by the first stragglers to Coblenz at about the same time as the news that in Paris the King had been deposed, the monarchy abolished and the Republic proclaimed by the National Convention at the first of its deliberations.

Louis XVI had been removed to the Temple a prisoner; and there were even rumours that he was to be brought to trial attainted of treason in that he had invited foreigners in arms to invade France.

This news brought dismay to a little house on the Grünplatz,

which Madame de Plougastel had rented upon the departure of the Princes and where her cousin Kercadiou his niece and André-Louis were lodged with her. It put an end to the term of happiness which had reigned there for the last five weeks. The Princes, they presently heard were at Namur and the Comte de Plougastel was with them.

For Madame de Plougastel the immediate outlook was not too disconcerting. She was supplied if not with money at least with the valuable jewels she had brought away with her, and these should provide for many a day. But the Lord of Gavrillac was at the end of his resources and compelled at last, for the first time in his life to bend his mind to the sordid details of provision for his existence.

It was for André-Louis to come to the rescue. In the prosperous days of his fencing academy in Paris, seeking an investment for his considerable savings, he had purchased a farm in Saxony. This land he now proposed to re-convert into gold so as to provide for their needs.

With twenty louis borrowed from Madame de Plougastel, the half of the sum she pressed upon him he set out for Dresden to negotiate the sale. All that we know of his activities there during the next four months is contained in two letters that survive out of several which appear to have passed between him and those he had left behind in Coblenz. The first of these is written from Dresden at the end of December

Monsieur my Godfather

An offer at last for these lands of mine at Heimthal has been made of six thousand crowns, which is to say thirty thousand livres. I paid, as I think you know, over two thousand louis for them two years ago, and the purchase was represented to me as a bargain at the time, and rightly so, as far as I am able to judge from an inspection of the property. The offer comes from the present Saxon tenant, who is imbued with the rascally acquisitive instincts commonly, but not on that account correctly, attributed to Hebrews. I say this the more feelingly since my mentor in these matters is a Jew named Ephraim, but for whose honesty I should long since have found myself in difficulties. Acting as my banker here he has regularly collected rents and paid dues, and in consequence I find some six hundred crowns at my disposal no inconsiderable sum in such times as these. It enables me, my dear godfather to send you a draft on Stoffel of Coblenz for two hundred crowns which will provide for your immediate necessities and those of my dear Aline.

My good Ephraim points out to me that my tenant, actuated

by the universal spirit in Germany at present towards French émigrés, hopes to trade upon my necessity and obtain the farm for one half of its value. He advises that sooner than submit to be robbed I should rid myself of this tenant, and until some honest purchaser presents himself I should farm the land myself. There is certainly a living in it, if a modest one. But my inclinations are hardly agrarian. Considering that the state of things in France becomes steadily worse and encourages little hope of an early return to Gavrillac, which by now moreover, will have suffered confiscation it is necessary to do something to keep ourselves afloat. I revert to my erstwhile notion of turning to account my knowledge of the sword. I have talked of it with Ephraim and on the security of the Heimthal property he will advance me the funds necessary to open and equip here in Dresden an academy of arms which I do not doubt my capacity of rendering as prosperous as my old school in the Rue du Hasard.

This is a pleasant town, with an agreeable society, in which once you were perceived that you are independent, you would find a cordial reception. I beg you, my dear godfather to give it thought and write to me. If you decide to join me I shall at once set about carrying my project into effect, and at the same time discover a suitable lodging for us all. It is not Peru that I offer you; but at least it is modest comfort and tranquillity. I add a little letter for Aline

He also adds inquiries on their health and recommends himself to the remembrance of Madame de Plougastel

The other surviving letter, from which we are similarly enabled to gather the march of events is from the Lord of Gavrillac. It is dated from Hamm in Westphalia, on the fourth of the following February

My dear Godson

I write within a few hours of our arrival here to let you know that we are now at Hamm where Monseigneur the Comte de Provence and Monseigneur the Comte d'Artois by the hospitality of the King of Prussia, have established themselves. Monsieur de Plougastel is in their very restricted train, and has desired Madame de Plougastel to join him here. Monsieur learning that Madame de Plougastel and I were together at Coblenz, was very graciously moved no doubt from his affection for my late brother, since I have done nothing to deserve it for myself to offer me also the hospitality of his very diminutive court. And so we have all come here together and we are lodged at the Bear a house kept by

kindly folk, and not expensive. The plight of the Princes is pitiful in the extreme, and their quarters in Hamm are utterly unworthy of persons of their exalted rank.

The hospitality of his Majesty the King of Prussia scarcely goes beyond permission to reside here. Hope of redemption seems to diminish daily. Yet the courage and fortitude of these Princes in adversity is beyond belief, as it is beyond praise even in this black hour when news comes from Paris of the horrible, incredible, sacrilegious crime of the canaille in putting the King to death. Monsieur has issued a declaration in which he assumes the regency, proclaims the Dauphin King of France, and nobly announces his sole ambition to be to avenge the blood of his brother, to break the chains which trammel his family to place the Dauphin on the throne, and to restore to France her ancient constitution.

We are still, as Aline will have told you in her last letter, under the same difficulty of making a decision for the future. Rabouillet has contrived, at considerable peril to himself, to send me fifty louis saved before the confiscations took place, and he tells me also good loyal soul, that he has buried the best of the silver so that it should not be seized. Almost I begin to think that your proposal which we treated perhaps too lightly at the time, offers the only practical relief of our difficulties. But I am reluctant to become a burden upon you, my dear godson, nor have I the right.

Aline is well, and she sends you her affectionate greetings with mine. She talks of you constantly from which it follows that her thoughts are constantly with you and that she misses you. This separation is not the least of our sorrows. But you are wise not to sell your land at a sacrifice in a time when we do not know where to look for our next resources.

CHAPTER IX

PROPOSAL

THREE days after the receipt of that letter and a week after it was written André-Louis appeared abruptly and unannounced in the town of Hamm, lying at the time under a pall of snow through which the river Lippe flowed like a stream of ink.

Two sentences in the letter were responsible for that pre-

cipitate journey: "I am reluctant to be a burden upon you," was one of them, and the allusion to the sorrow of the separation the other.

André-Louis came in person to demonstrate that this sorrow at least could be determined and to combat his godfather's scruples to receive assistance from him scruples which he regarded as fantastic.

He found the Bear to be a quite considerable inn, far better than his first view of this low-lying little town on the Lippe—not, indeed, much more than a village—would have led him to expect. A staircase of polished pine ascended from the common room to a gallery about three sides of which the guest chambers were set, and the three best of these, despite shrinking funds and hazardous outlook, had been appropriated by the Lord of Gavrillic for himself and his niece.

Monsieur and Madame de Plougastel occupied a similar lodging on the ground floor behind the common room, and two or three others of those who made up the simulacrum of a court for the Regent of France were also housed at the Bear.

It was late afternoon when André-Louis drew rein in the crisp-edged slush that was beginning to freeze before the door of the inn.

Armstadt, the landlord, lounged forward, and perceiving an unattended traveller on a jaded post-horse with an insignificant valise strapped to his saddle, did not account it necessary to put aside his porcelain pipe. But the brisk, peremptory tone in which the traveller asked for the Lord of Gavrillic, the look in his dark eyes, the sword he wore and the holsters in the saddle aroused the landlord from his languor.

André-Louis' advent took them by surprise. Aline and Monsieur de Kercadiou were together when he entered the room on the gallery to which the landlord ushered him. They started up, crying his name in amazement and then in gladness. Each seized him by a hand to demand an explanation.

His lips sped from his godfather's hand to the lips of Aline, which never had been more freely offered. Her eyes sparkled with delight, and yet, with fond concern in their depths, scanned every line of his countenance.

The reception warmed him like wine. He glowed in this atmosphere of affection. All was very well. He was glad that he had come.

He was treated like the prodigal. At supper, which out of consideration for him was served almost immediately, a goose filled the rôle of the fatted calf, and there was the ham of a boar

from the Black Forest and a flagon of smooth perfumed golden Rupertsberger into which the essences of a whole Rhineland summer had been distilled.

For folk upon the brink of destitution it was none so bad, thought André-Louis.

Across the white napery, where glassware sparkled in the candlelight, he silently, happily, toasted Aline, and found his toast returned by moist eyes agleam with a new tenderness.

After supper he told them precisely what had brought him. He was there to combat his godfather's reluctance to allow him to provide for them in the only way in which he was capable of doing it.

He invited his godfather to look the facts in the face, to give due weight to the events in France: the King beheaded, the monarchy abolished, the estates of the nobles confiscated, their land distributed among "those who had no land", as if to have had land in the past were now a crime to be punished, and not to have had it until now a virtue to be rewarded.

"Just as the Third Estate wrested power from the aristocracy, intending to distribute it equitably throughout the entire nation, so now the rabble has wrested power from the Third, intending to monopolize it. Privilege is changing hands. Instead of privilege in the palace, in the hands of men who by birth and breeding are naturally fitted for government, however in the past they may have abused it, we have now privilege in the gutter. The land wrested from its owners for distribution, the moveables dispersed and sold for the benefit of the nation, are the bribes with which a gang of greedy scoundrels incites the populace to place the power in their hands. This ignorant populace, deluded and flattered by them, sustains by weight of numbers the men who make this use of it. The ultimate result must be chaos and the ruin of France. Then, either by force of arms or otherwise, a new state may be built on these ruins; and order, equity and security shall again prevail. Restitution may well be among its first activities. But the process must be slow as time is measured in the lives of men. What will you do while you wait? How will you live until then?"

"But my claim on you, André?" cried the Lord of Gavrillic, in repudiation.

"Will be the claim of kinship once Aline and I are married. Think of us, my godfather. Are we to let our youth run to waste in waiting for events that may not happen in our lifetime?" He turned to Aline. "Surely, my dear, you agree with me. You see no gain in this postponement?"

She smiled frankly and tenderly. Indeed, the tenderness she displayed to him that night was to be a lasting memory of the happiest hours he had ever known.

"My dear, in this I have no will that is not yours."

Monsieur de Kercadiou got up. He sighed. Perhaps the very source of André-Louis' exaltation that night was to him a source of sadness. The utter surrender to André-Louis revealed by Aline's tone and manner, brought him perhaps a sudden sense of loneliness. For years this niece, who was dear as a daughter, had been all his family. He grew conscious now that he had lost her.

He stood there a moment, a squat, brooding figure in his brown velvet coat, his great head, which always seemed too heavy for his body, sinking forward until his chin was on the laces at his neck. "Well, well!" he said huskily. "We'll sleep on it, and talk of it again to-morrow."

But in the morning he postponed discussion until later. He could not stay for it then. He explained that he had duties to perform in the Regent's chancellery which kept him engaged daily until a little after noon.

"We are a very few to compose Monsieur's household," he said sadly. "Each of us must do what he can."

At the door he paused. "We will talk of it all at dinner. Meanwhile, I shall mention the matter to his highness. Oh, and as I go I shall send word to Madame de Plougastel that you are here."

The sun was shining out of a clear, frosty sky, and the snow under foot was crisp as salt. After Madame de Plougastel had paid them a short visit, in the course of which she gave encouragement to the plan of early marriage and the rest, Aline and André-Louis went forth to take the air. Light of heart as children they walked down the main street to the bridge, and here they turned to follow a footpath by the glittering river about the edge of which films of ice were slowly dissolving in the sun.

Their talk now was of the future. He described a house with a fair garden on the outskirts of Dresden, which he had in view, which could be rented and to the renting of which Ephraim would help him. "But a little place, Aline; no greater than a cottage in truth, and not the setting in which I would desire to see you placed."

Hanging on his arm, she drew closer to him. "My dear, it will be ours," she said in a crooning tone, and so closed the argument in rapture.

Never, not since the incredible hour of her surrender on that August morning following the day on which he had brought her

out of the horrors of Paris, had he known Aline so yielding, so meekly loving so entirely his own. Always had there been a measure of restraint, and her will, as we know, had clashed more than once against his own. Now such a thing seemed impossible ever again, so discarded by her was all reserve, so submissive was she, so eager to please.

It may have been his protracted absence that had rendered her aware of the true depth of her feelings for him, brought her to realize how necessary he had become to her happiness to her existence.

They came to a fence that ran down to the murmuring water. Beyond it a little rivulet tumbled into the Lippe over a miniature cascade, at the sides of which long icicles glittered iridescent in the morning sun. At her request he hoisted her to the fence, so that she might rest a moment before they retraced their steps. Having set her there, he stood before her, and her hands were on his shoulders, and her blue eyes smiled softly into his.

"I am so glad, André so glad, so glad that we are not to part again—that this time you have come to me to stay."

He heard the words and, intoxicated by the fond tone in which they were uttered, he missed the faint note of fear that beat in the heart of it, that may have been the very source of her utterance. He kissed her—Her face close to his—she looked deep into his eyes.

"It is for always, André?"

"For always dear love. For always," he answered in a solemn voice that made the phrase a vow.

CHAPTER X

DISPOSAL

THE Count of Provence—Regent of France since the execution of his brother Louis XVI—sat at a writing-table in the window of a large, low-ceilinged room that was at once study, audience-chamber and salon d'honneur, in the wooden chalet at Hamm that he was permitted to occupy by the indulgence of the King of Prussia. His highness was learning in the bitter school of experience that friends are for the fortunate.

Some few there were who clung to him. But these were men, *mutatis mutandi*, in his own sad case ; men who served him, and continued to discern in him princely qualities because their future was bound up with his own.

Nevertheless his confidence was as unabated as his corpulence. He preserved at once his bulk and his faith in himself and destiny. He maintained upon slenderest means and in almost ignoble surroundings a sort of state. Four ministers were appointed to deal with his affairs, and with two secretaries and four servants, made up his establishment and that of his brother, the Comte d'Artois, who had joined him here after having been arrested for debt at Mæstricht. He had his ambassadors at all the courts of Europe ; and to accelerate the inevitable he spent long hours daily writing letters in that fine, precise, upright hand of his to his brother-rulers and to his sister-ruler, Catherine of Russia, in whom he founded considerable hopes. One or two of his correspondents meanwhile lent him a little money.

The only ladies attached to this court of his were Madame de Plougastel and Mademoiselle de Kercadiou, the wife of one and the niece of the other of the two gentlemen who were at present acting as his secretaries. The Countess of Provence and her sister, the Countess of Artois, remained forgotten in Turin at the court of their father. Madame de Balbi, whose joyous nature found no scope at the dour court of his Sardinian majesty and whose sybaritic tastes could not have endured for a day the monastic privations of Hamm, had established herself at Brussels, whilst awaiting those better times which now seemed to recede instead of approaching. A genuine affection for her being one of his redeeming characteristics, Monsieur could not bring himself to send for her and doom her to these Westphalian hardships. Besides, it was always possible that she would have refused to come.

From its scant, severe furnishings you might almost judge the room he now occupied to have been a monastery parlour. Gone were the white-and-gold walls, the long mirrors, the crystal chandeliers, the soft carpets, the rich brocades and the gilt furniture of Schönbornlust. The only armchair present, and this with a simple serge cushion, was that which his highness occupied at his plain writing-table. For the rest, a chestnut press against one wall, some plain chairs of oak or elm set about a table of polished pine, made up the room's equipment. There was no carpet on the floor. The window by which his highness's table was set looked out upon a desolate and untidy garden.

In attendance upon him now were the young and delicate

d'Avaray, who was virtually his first minister of State; the tall, dry, capable Baron de Flachslanden, his minister for Foreign Affairs; the dark, restless d'Enragues, most active and zealous of secret agents and most accomplished libertine; the Comte de Jaucourt, who still performed the daily miracle of an irreproachable elegance of apparel and who preserved the nimbus of romance which his gallantries had earned him; the short, stocky self-sufficient Comte de Plougastel; and, lastly, Monsieur de Kercadiou.

It was to Monsieur de Kercadiou that his highness was now particularly addressing himself, whilst really speaking to them all.

Monsieur de Kercadiou, not without some hesitation, had suggested the possibility of his early retirement from the inconsiderable duties which his highness graciously permitted him to discharge.

His niece was about to marry Monsieur Moreau, who, to support her, would open an academy of arms in Dresden. Monsieur de Kercadiou was offered a home with them, and as his resources were dwindling and the prospects of a return to France were now remote, he did not think that he could in prudence or in justice oppose the plan of the young people.

Dark grew the Prince's fleshly countenance as he listened. The handsome liquid eyes considered the Bréton gentleman in surprise and displeasure.

"Prudence and justice, eh?" He smiled between wistfulness and scorn. "Frankly, monsieur, I perceive neither the one nor the other." He paused there a moment, and then abruptly asked: "What is this man Moreau?"

"He is my godson, monseigneur."

Monsieur clucked impatiently. "Yes, yes. That we know, as also that he was a revolutionary, one of the gentlemen responsible for the present ruin. But what else is he?"

"What else? Why, by profession, originally a lawyer. He was educated at Louis-le-Grand."

Monsieur nodded. "I understand. You evade my question. The answer being really that he is nobody's son. Yet you do not hesitate to permit your niece, a person of birth and distinction, to enter into this mésalliance."

"I do not," said Monsieur de Kercadiou dryly. In reality, although he concealed it, since it was a sentiment impossible to display to royalty, he was moved to indignation.

"You do not?" The thick black brows were raised. The fine eyes opened a little wider in astonishment. Monsieur looked at his gentlemen: at Monsieur d'Avaray leaning on the

window-sill beside him, at the other four who made a group by the table in mid-chamber. His expression clearly invited them to share his amazement.

Monsieur de Plougastel was heard to utter a short soft laugh.

"Your highness forgets the debt under which I lie to Monsieur Moreau," said the Lord of Gavrillic in an attempt to defend at once himself and his godson. He stood immediately before the Regent's writing-table, with a deepened colour in his pink, pock-marked face, a troubled look in his pale eyes.

Monsieur was sententious. "No debt in the world between yourself and Monsieur Moreau can demand payment in such coin."

"But the young people love each other," Monsieur de Kercadiou protested.

Monsieur displayed his irritation in a frown. Again he replied sententiously.

"A young maid's fancy is easily captivated. It is the duty of her natural guardians to shield her from the consequences of a passing exaltation."

"I cannot so regard her sentiments, monseigneur."

His highness considered, then set himself to reason. As a *raisonneur* he held himself in high esteem.

"I can understand that you should be deceived by our unhappy circumstances, circumstances which, unless we are vigilant, may lead to the loss of our sense of values. You are in danger of this, I think, my dear Gavrillic. Common misfortune acting as a leveller makes you lose sight of the difference, the inefaceable difference, that lies between persons born, like yourself and your niece, and a man such as Monsieur Moreau. You are driven by circumstances to admit inferiors to a sort of equality, you are constrained to accept favours from them which dispose you to forget that their place is still below the salt. I cannot presume to command you in this matter, my dear Gavrillic. But let me exhort you very earnestly, and entirely as a friend, to delay all decision until you are happily restored to Gavrillic, and the things of this world once more assume their proper relative proportions. Then you will no longer be in danger, as now, of having your judgment falsified."

Overwhelmed by this oration from royal lips, whose utterances generations of loyalty to an idea rendered oracular in the ears of men of his simple straightforward mind, Monsieur de Kercadiou found himself in an agony of perplexity. The perspiration stood on his brow. But still he braced himself to hold his ground.

"Monseigneur," he argued desperately, "it is precisely because the return to Gavrillic seems now so remote, because we are in

sight of the end of our resources, that common prudence demands that my niece should avail herself of the protection and provision of this marriage."

The Regent drummed impatiently upon the table. "Are you really of so little faith, that you speak of your return to Gavrillic, which is to say our return to France, as a thing remote?"

"Alas, monseigneur! What else can I believe?"

"What else? What else?" Again Monsieur looked at the others as if inviting them to share his impatience at such blindness. "Surely you fail to read the signs. Yet they are very plain."

And now at last he launched upon a political discourse, which summed up the European situation as he perceived it. He began by pointing out that whatever apathy might hitherto have existed among the sovereigns of Europe towards the events in France, this had at last been rudely dispelled by the monstrous crime of the execution of the King. Hitherto those rulers might have thought of advantages to themselves in the paralysis which the revolution had laid upon France. They might have imagined that they would be strengthened by her removal from competition in the world's affairs. But now all this was changed.

France as now governed was rightly perceived to be a canker-spot of anarchy, a peril to civilization. Already the revolutionaries were disclosing their aims to reform the whole world in accordance with their own ideas—ideas which must always find response among the worthless of every nation, for they were ideas which gave the worthless the opportunities from which in a well-ordered society their worthlessness must exclude them. In France the lowest scoundrels, the very riff-raff of the nation, were in the saddle, and their agents abroad were already at work disseminating these pestilent, poisonous, anarchical doctrines: in Switzerland, in Belgium, in Italy and in England the first hissings of this foul serpent were already to be heard.

Could any man of vision really suppose that the great powers of Europe would remain indifferent in the face of this? Was it not evident that for their own sake, for the sake of their self-preservation, they must rise up without delay and unite in extirpating this canker, in delivering France from her present evil thralldom, and purifying her of her disease before the contagion spread to themselves?

Already from England, from Russia, from Austria and elsewhere, Monsieur's agents wrote to inform him that activity was afoot. D'Entragues could tell them of the extent of this, of the imminence of action, decisive action which must bring the revolutionaries to their knees at any moment. That very morn-

ing d'Entragues, as he could tell them, had received word that England had now joined the coalition against France. It was great news if they properly considered its significance. Hitherto, Pitt had been profiting by the French revolution to magnify England, just as Richelieu had profited by the English crisis of 1640 to ensure the ascendancy of France. Yet now they heard that Chauvelin, the Republican minister in London, had been dismissed the court of St. James's. There was a state of war between England and revolutionary France.

"Revive your faith, then, my dear Gavrillac," the Regent concluded. "Postpone decisions wrung from you by present transient necessities. As for these, had I but known that they are pressing, restricted as are the means at my disposal, I could not have consented to receive without remuneration the valuable secretarial services you have been discharging. D'Avaray here will provide for that in the future. You will see to it at once, d'Avaray; so that from now onwards our good Gavrillac need be under no financial anxiety."

Confused, confounded, shamed out of all further resistance, Monsieur de Kercadiou began a quavering protest.

"Ah, but, monseigneur, aware as I am of the slenderness of your own resources, I could not accept——"

He was interrupted almost sternly. "Not another word, monsieur. I do no more than my duty by a zealous servant in depriving him of every pretext to run counter to my wishes."

Bewildered, Monsieur de Kercadiou could only bow submission, and then a knock at the door came to seal a discussion which his highness had indicated was at an end. M. de Kercadiou moved away, mopping his brow.

Plougastel went to open. A servant in plain livery entered and stood murmuring to the Count. The Count turned to the Regent. His pompous, affected voice made an announcement.

"Monsieur de Batz is here, monseigneur."

"Monsieur de Batz!" There was surprise in the tone. The fleshly face grew set, the full sensual mouth tightened. "Monsieur de Batz!" he repeated, this time on a note of scorn. "He has returned then? For what has he returned?" He looked round as he asked the question.

"Would it not be well to let him tell you, monseigneur?" ventured d'Entragues.

The liquid eyes stared at him from under knit brows. Then his highness shrugged his heavy shoulders, and spoke to Plougastel. "Very well. Let him be admitted since he has the effrontery to present himself."

CHAPTER XI

THE SPLENDID FAILURE

THAT Monsieur de Batz was certainly not lacking in effrontery his carriage showed. He came in with a swagger.

Although he had arrived in Hamm within the hour, he displayed no stains of travel. A person of neat, tidy habits, he had carefully restored himself to order at the inn. He wore an apricot velvet coat and black satin smalls, stockings of black silk and red-heeled shoes with silver buckles. He carried a three-cornered hat adorned by a white cockade. His brown hair was carefully clubbed.

He came forward briskly, his keen lively eyes throwing passing glances of recognition at the attendant gentlemen. He halted, waited a moment for the Regent to extend his hand; but he was nowise abashed when this did not happen. He bowed, his face set in lines of utmost gravity, and waited as the etiquette prescribed for his highness to address him.

The Regent, half twisted in his chair, considered him without friendliness.

"So you have returned, Monsieur de Batz. We were not expecting you." He paused, and added coldly: "We are not pleased with you, Monsieur de Batz."

"Faith I'm not pleased with myself," said the Baron whom nothing could put out of countenance.

"We wonder that you should have troubled to return."

"I come to render my accounts, monseigneur."

"They are rendered. The events have rendered them. They have very fully reported your failure."

The Gascon knit his brows. "With submission, monseigneur, I cannot control Fate. I cannot say to Destiny: 'Halte-là! It is de Batz who passes.'"

"Ah! You lay the blame on Destiny? She is the scapegoat of every incompetent."

"I am not of those, monseigneur. If I were not extremely competent, I should not be here. By now I should have put my head through the little window of the guillotine in Paris."

"Your failure leaves you unabashed, sir."

"Failure must be measured by the attempt. I attempted a miracle with no more than ordinary human powers."

"You were very confident of being able to perform it when you induced us to entrust you with the task."

"Will your highness suffer a question? Was there amongst all the twenty thousand French exiles who followed you at the time any other who begged to be entrusted with it?"

"Another might have been found. I should have sought him, no doubt, but for your overweening confidence in your own powers to save the King."

Still de Batz kept his countenance in the face of this monstrous obstinacy in ingratitude. But he could not quite exclude asperity from his reply.

"Your highness would have sought him had it occurred to you that such an attempt was possible. It does not follow that your highness would have found him. But it does follow that had you found him he must have failed."

"*Must* have failed? And why, if you please?"

"Because I failed. And where I failed, I'll take leave to inform your highness that no man could have succeeded."

In the group by the table behind him someone laughed. De Batz quivered as if he had been struck. But it was scarcely perceptible, and beyond this he gave no sign. Monsieur was regarding him in cold incredulity.

"Still, and in spite of all, the boastful Gascon!"

This was too much even for de Batz's self-control. He permitted his tone to express an infinite bitterness. "Your highness is pleased to rebuke me."

His highness was annoyed by the imputation of injustice. "Have you not deserved it, monsieur? Did you not win our trust by your emphatic assertions, your boastful promises? Did you not pledge me your word that you would bring the King safely out of Paris if I would entrust you with the means? I gave liberally all that you demanded out of a treasury from which we could ill spare the gold; gold which to-day might be used to nourish French gentlemen who are starving in exile. What have you done with this gold?"

The Baron audibly caught his breath. His intrepid countenance had turned pale under its healthy tan. "I can assure your highness that I have not used a louis of it to my own advantage."

"I do not ask you what you have not done with it. But what you have done."

"Your highness requires accounts of me?"

"Is not that the purpose of your return? To render your accounts?"

The Baron shifted his position, so that by a half-turn of his head he could survey every man in the room. His glittering eyes looked at the pallid d'Avaray, still leaning on the window-

sill. The favourite's face was a mask. The Gascon's glance travelled on. Flachslanden and Plougastel were rigidly glum. Kercadiou showed a countenance of gentle sympathy. D'Entragues was sneering and de Batz remembered how from the outset d'Entragues—jealous of any secret-agent work of which he was not himself the instigator and guide—had opposed the undertaking had stigmatized it as crackbrained and impossible, and had argued against the supply of means for it.

At the end of that moment's utter silence, the Baron spoke very quietly.

"I have kept no accounts in detail. I had not thought that it would be required of me. I am not a trader to keep ledgers, monseigneur; and this is not an affair of trade. But from memory I will do my best to prepare a statement. Meanwhile I can assure you, monseigneur, that the sums expended amount to more than twice those which I had from your highness."

"What do you tell me, sir? Is this another Gasconnade? Whence could you have procured the money?"

"If I say that I procured it, it must follow that I did. For, although a Gascon, I have found no one yet of a temerity to doubt my honour or to assume that I might soil myself by falsehood. I spent the gold in corrupting some of the easily corruptible canaille that has charge of the administration in France to-day. Every man who could be of service to me, who could assist me in my design, I bribed to neglect his duty.

"For the rest, monseigneur, my failure is to be attributed to two factors which I did not take into account when I entered upon this difficult and hazardous undertaking. The first of these is the fact that the King was already a closely-guarded prisoner when I reached Paris. I arrived some few days too late for the plan which I had in mind. And for that delay, if you will do me the justice, monseigneur, to carry your mind back to Coblenz, when first I laid my plans before you, the blame attaches to Monsieur d'Entragues."

D'Entragues started in surprise to exclaim angrily:

"To me, sir? To me?"

"To you, sir," snapped de Batz, glad at last to fasten his teeth in someone who was not shielded by rank. "Had you not contemned my design, argued against it with his highness, described it as a reckless gamble of means that could not be spared, I should have started three weeks earlier. I should have been in Paris while the King was still at large in the Luxembourg, a full fortnight before he was conveyed a prisoner to the Temple; and my task would have been easy."

"We have your word for that," said d'Entragues, with a curling lip and a sidelong glance at Monsieur.

"You have, and you will be wise not to doubt it," said the Baron sharply, so sharply that the Regent rapped the table to remind them of his presence and the deference due to him.

"The second cause of your failure, Monsieur de Batz?" he asked, to keep him to the point.

"This lay in a danger of which I was always aware, but the risk of which I must accept. Finding my original intentions frustrated by his majesty's captivity, I was under the necessity of formulating another plan of campaign. A choice of alternatives presented itself. Rightly or wrongly, I decided that an eleventh-hour rescue was the one that offered the best chances. I am still persuaded that I made a wise choice and that but for betrayal I should have succeeded. The organization of this attempt called for infinite labour, infinite caution, infinite patience. All these I was able to supply. I got together a little band of royalists, entrusting to each of them the enlisting of others. Soon we were five hundred strong, and in constant touch with one another. These five hundred I instructed, equipped and armed there in Paris under the nose of the Convention and its Office of Surveillance. I spent money freely to accomplish it.

"When it was clear that his Majesty would be brought to trial and that the sentence was foregone, I completed my plan of action. It was plain to all that whilst the more abandoned of the rabble would look with satisfaction upon the execution of the King, the main body of the people would regard it with fear and horror. This main body was dominated by the noisy aggressiveness of a minority; but a bold call at the right moment would arouse it from its paralysis. There is a glamour about the person of a consecrated king. He is less a human being than a symbol, the incarnation of an idea; and to all men of any imagination or sensibility there is a repugnance to see violence done to him. I founded my hopes upon this. I would post my five hundred at a convenient point, which the King must pass on his way to execution. When he reached it I would give the signal. My five hundred would raise the cry of 'Live the King!' and hurl themselves upon the guards."

He paused for a moment. The seven men in the room, caught in the spell of his exposition, seemed scarcely to breathe. All eyes were upon him.

"Can your highness doubt—can anyone doubt—what must have followed? My five hundred would have supplied the

nucleus for a massed rising to rescue his Majesty. They would have supplied the cutting edge to an axe that would have derived its weight of metal from those who would instantly have flocked to join them. The paralysis of the majority would have been broken." He sighed. "Hélas! Could any of you have been there as I was, at the appointed place, at the corner of the Rue de la Lune, under the bastion of the Bonne Nouvelle, could you have seen as I saw, the awe in the ranks of those who waited to see the royal carriage pass on its way to the Place de la Revolution as they now call the Place Louis XV, could you have observed the scared silence of those thousands, you would not have doubted what must follow upon my rallying cry and the dash of my five hundred.

"Standing there, waiting in the crowd, I was not only confident of success for the immediate design, but I had more than a hope to start a conflagration in which the revolution would have been consumed. Given such a rallying-point as we should have provided for the thousands who mistrust the new régime and view with horror the spread of anarchy and confusion, but who stand spellbound for lack of resolute leadership we might have brought about such a rising as would have carried the King back to his throne and swept away for ever the Convention and its supporting rabble."

He paused again, and smiled wryly upon their intentness.

"But I was Gasconnading, as you would say, monseigneur. Of what use to continue? I failed. Let that alone be remembered. The intelligence to plot, the skill to combine, the energy and courage that were ready to execute, of what account are these when the goal is missed? When the narrow line that sometimes lies between success and failure has not been crossed?"

His sarcasm stung them. Yet his highness overlooked it in the breathless interest de Batz had aroused.

"But how came you to fail? How?"

A shadow crossed the Baron's face. "I have already told you. The plan was betrayed by one of those—I know not which—in whom I was compelled to trust."

"That was inevitable with so many in the secret," rasped d'Entraques. "It should have been foreseen."

"It was foreseen. I am not quite a fool, Monsieur d'Entraques. But to foresee is not always to be able to forestall. A man caught in a burning house will foresee that if he jumps from a window he may break his neck. But that should not prevent him from jumping since, if he remains, he will be burned alive. I perceived the risk, and I did what was humanly possible to

guard against it. I had no choice but to accept it. There was no other way."

"What happened, then?" his highness demanded. "You have not told us that."

"The details?" De Batz shrugged again. "Oh, if they interest you, monseigneur . . ." And he resumed: "I repeat that Paris as a body did not desire the death of the King; that the Parisians were appalled, awe-stricken in the face of a deed which savoured of sacrilege, and from which they instinctively feared terrible consequences to themselves. As I have said, no man who saw the crowd in the streets on that January morning could have a doubt on this. And the Convention was aware of it, the Committees of the Sections were aware of it. From the Temple to the Place de la Revolution, a double file of soldiers held the route in which all traffic was that day forbidden."

"The King had for escort not merely a mounted regiment of National Gendarmerie and a regiment of grenadiers of the National Guard, but a battery of cannon that rolled thundering through the streets immediately ahead of the royal carriage. This was densely surrounded by guards. Its closed windows were smeared with lather, so that not so much as a glimpse of the royal countenance should act as an incitement to the spirit which the authorities knew to be abroad. The tramp of marching feet, the rumble and rattle of the gun-carriages and the rolling of the drums were the only sounds. A silence such as that in which those thousands stood to see his Majesty pass to execution must have been witnessed to be credited, must have been experienced to realize its impressiveness, its unnatural, uncanny solemnity."

"I dwell on this, monseigneur, to show you how far I was from any miscalculation of the public spirit upon which I was depending. The authorities were aware that their own existence was at stake that day." He raised his voice with sudden vehemence. "I do not hesitate to assert that their gamble in sending the King to execution was infinitely more desperate than mine in conceiving the attempt to rescue him."

He flung down that sentence like a gauntlet, and paused a moment to see if any would take it up, his eyes challenging in particular Monsieur d'Entragues. Then returning to his earlier, rather wistful tone, he resumed his narrative.

"Before seven o'clock that morning I was at the point I had chosen for the attempt, at the corner of the Rue de la Lune. I climbed to the top of the bastion and waited. Time passed. The crowd behind the military files increased in density and

stood silent in the chill of awe which went deeper than the chill of that misty winter's morning. I scanned the throng for my five hundred in ever increasing anxiety. I could discover none of them. At last, when already in the distance we could make out the approaching roll of the drums, I was joined on my eminence by two of my followers, the Marquis de la Guiche and Devaux. They shared my despair when I was unable to explain the absence of the others."

Afterwards, when all was over, I discovered that in the night the Committee of Surveillance, furnished, no doubt by our betrayer, with a list of the names and addresses of my five hundred had taken its measures.

"Two gendarmes had waited upon each of my royalists. They were placed under temporary arrest in their own lodgings, until noon, until it should be too late for any attempt to thwart the intentions of the Convention. No further measures were taken against them. Five hundred men are not to be indicted upon the word of a single traitor, and there was no evidence against them otherwise. We had been too cautious. Also perhaps the moment was not one for proceedings against men who had sought to avert a deed by which the nation was temporarily appalled.

"That is all my tale. When the royal carriage was abreast of me, I lost my head. It does not often happen, Gascon though I may be. I leapt down from the bastion, Devaux and La Guiche followed me. I attempted to break through the crowd. I waved my hat. I raised a shout. Even then I hoped against hope that we three could accomplish the task alone and give a lead that would be followed. I raised a cry of 'Save the King!' Perhaps the thunder of the drums drowned my feeble voice for all except those immediately about me. These shrank from me in dread. Yet it is significant, monseigneur it shows yet again how well-judged were the assumptions upon which I acted that no attempt was made to seize me. I departed unhindered with the only two of my band who like myself had not spent the night at their usual lodging.

"That, monseigneur, is the full account of the failure of that Gasconade of mine. As for the moneys that I have spent——"

"Leave that," the Regent peevishly interrupted him. "Leave that." He sat there, his heavy body sagging limply, his double chin sunk to his breast, vacant-eyed, lost in thought. The narrative had shamed him for his cavalier reception of the intrepid Baron, and it had shamed those others with him. Even d'Entraques, that hostile critic stood silent and abashed.

But in vain persons shame is an emotion commonly with reactions of resentment against those who have provoked it. Presently, while de Batz waited, his highness rallied. He sat up, threw back his head, wrapped himself in a mantle of dignity, and delivered himself with pompous formality.

"We are grateful to you, Monsieur de Batz, for these explanations, no less than for your activities, which we regret with you should not have been attended by the success they appear to have deserved. At the moment that would seem to be all, unless . . ." He looked questioningly from d'Avaray to d'Entraques.

Answering that glance, Monsieur d'Avaray silently shook his head, made a faint gesture of protest with one of his delicate almost translucent hands. D'Entraques bowed stiffly.

"I have no comment, Monseigneur, for Monsieur de Batz."

The Baron looked at them with frank incredulity. They had no comments!

"I realize, of course," he said, and so level was his tone that they could only suspect his irony, "that what I have done deserves no commendation. Judgment must always be upon results." And then, in a vindictive desire to heap coals of fire upon their heads—heads which he began to account ignoble and contemptible—he went on smoothly: "But my task in the service of the monarchy is far from ended. My little army of loyal men is still on foot. I should not have quitted France but that I accounted it my duty to make a full report to your highness in person. Having made it, I crave your highness's leave to return, and such commands as you may have for me."

"You propose to return? To Paris?"

"I have said, monseigneur, that I would not have left but for the duty to report to you."

"And what do you hope to do there now?"

"Perhaps—unless I have entirely forfeited your confidence—your highness will instruct me in your wishes."

The Regent was at fault. He turned to d'Entraques for assistance. D'Entraques was equally destitute of ideas, and said so in many words.

"We will consider, Monsieur de Batz," the Regent informed him. "We will consider, and inform you. We need not detain you longer at the moment."

With condescension, as if to temper the chill of that dismissal, Monsieur held out his plump white hand. The Baron took it, bowed very low over it, and bore it to lips that were faintly twisted in a smile.

Then he straightened himself, turned sharply on his red heels, and ignoring the others marched stiffly out of that cedar-panelled, low-ceilinged, uncarpeted audience-chamber.

CHAPTER XII

THE VULNERABLE POINT

ON the steps of the Bear Inn next morning the Baron de Bata came face to face with Monsieur Moreau. He halted in surprise.

"Ah!" said he. "It is our friend the Paladin."

"Ah!" said André-Louis. "It is our Gascon gentleman who is in love with peril."

The Baron laughed on that, and proffered his hand.

'Faith! Not always. I have been through the worst peril that can beset a man: the peril of using his temper. Does it ever happen to you?"

"Never. I have no illusions."

"You do not believe in fairies, or even in the gratitude of princes?"

"It is possible to believe in fairies," was the gloomy answer. André-Louis was plunged in gloom. It appeared that his journey from Dresden had been in vain. The Regent's opposition to Monsieur de Kercadiou's departure had put an end to indecision. The Regent's assurance that their return to France was imminent, encouraged Monsieur de Kercadiou to insist that the marriage must wait until they should be back at Gavrillac. Against this André-Louis had argued in vain. His godfather accounted himself pledged and would not listen.

Yet because Aline was now on the side of André-Louis, her uncle consented to compromise.

"If," he had said, "within a year the path of our return does not lie clearly open. I will submit to whatever you may decide." To hearten them he added: "You will see that you will not have to wait the half of that time."

But André-Louis was not heartened. "Do not deceive yourself, monsieur. In a year from now the only difference will be that we shall be a year older, and sadder by the further extinction of hope."

Because of this, his present meeting with de Batz was to prove critical and bear unexpected fruit.

They moved into the common-room together and sat down to a flagon of the famous Rupertsberger, with a dried sausage to prepare the palate for its benign flavour. Over this the Baron told again, and with greater wealth of detail, the story of his Parisian adventure.

"It was a miracle that you escaped," was André-Louis' final comment, after he had expressed his wonder at so much cool heroism.

De Batz shrugged. "Faith, no miracle at all. All that a man needs is common sense, common prudence and a little courage. You others here abroad judge by the reports that reach you of violence and outrage; and since you hear nothing else you conceive that violence and outrage have become the sole occupation of the Parisians. Thus the man who reads history imagines that the past was nothing but a succession of battles, since the infinitely greater periods of peace and order call for no particular comment. You hear of an aristocrat hunted through the streets, and hanged on a lantern at the end of the chase, or of a dozen others carted to the Place de la Revolution and guillotined, and you conceive that every aristocrat who shows himself in public is either lanterned or beheaded. I have actually heard it so asserted. But it is nonsense. There must be in Paris to-day some forty or fifty thousand royalists of one kind and another, moving freely: a fifth of the total population. Another fifth of it, if not more, is of no particular political colour but ready to submit to whatever government is up.

"Naturally these people do not commit extravagances to attract resentful attention. They do not wave their hats and shout 'Live the King!' at every street corner. They go quietly about their business; for the ordinary business of life goes on, and ordinary, quiet citizens suffer little interference. It is true that there is unrest and general uneasiness, punctuated by violent explosions of popular temper accompanied by violence and bloodshed. But side by side with it the normal life of a great city flows along. Men buy and sell, amuse themselves, marry, get children, and die in their beds, all in the normal manner. If many churches are closed and only constitutional priests are suffered to minister, yet all the theatres flourish and no one concerns himself with the politics of the actors.

"If things were otherwise, if they even approached the conception of them that is held abroad, the revolution would soon come to an end for it would consume itself. A few days

of such utter chaos as is generally pictured, and the means of sustaining life would no longer circulate; the inhabitants of Paris would perish of starvation."

André-Louis nodded. "You make it clear. There must be a great deal of misconception."

"And a great deal that is deliberately manufactured; counter-revolutionary rumours to stir up public feeling abroad. The factory is over there in that wooden chalet, where Monsieur keeps his court and his chancellery. It is diligently circulated by the Regent's agents, who are scattered over Europe and marshalled by the ingenious Monsieur d'Entraques the muck-rake in chief."

André-Louis stared at him. You express yourself like a republican."

"Do not be deceived by it. Look to my actions. It is merely that I permit myself the luxury of despising Monsieur le Comte d'Entraques and his methods. I do not like the man, and he does me the honour not to like me. A mean, jealous creature, with inordinate ambitions. He aims at being the first man in the State when the monarchy is restored and he is fearful and resentful of any man who might gain influence with the Regent. The man whom he most hates and fears is d'Avaray, and unless the favourite looks well to himself d'Entraques will ruin him yet with Monsieur. For he burrows craftily underground, leaving little trace upon the surface. He is subtle and insinuating as a serpent."

"To come back," said André-Louis, who cared nothing about Monsieur d'Entraques. "It still remains a miracle that you should have gone about such a task as yours in Paris and maintained the air of pursuing what you call the ordinary business of life."

"I was prudent, of course. I did not often trip."

"Not often! But to have tripped once should have broken your neck."

De Batz smiled. "I carried a life-preserver. Monsieur furnished me before I set out with a thousand louis towards the expenses of my campaign. I was able to add to it four times as much, and I could have added as much more as was necessary. You see that I was well supplied with money."

"But how could money have availed you in such extremities?"

"I know of no extremity in which money will not avail a man. For a weapon of defence as of offence, steel cannot begin to compare with gold. With gold I choked the mouths of those who would have denounced me. With gold I annihilated

the sense of duty of those who should have hindered me." He laughed into André-Louis' round eyes. "Aura sacra fames ! The greed of it is common to mankind ; but never have I found that greed so fierce as among Messieurs the sansculottes. That greed, I believe, is at the root of their revolutionary fervour. I surprise you it seems."

"A little, I confess."

"Ah !" The Baron held his glass to the light, and considered the faint opalescence which the wintry sunshine brought into the golden liquid. "Have you ever considered equality, its mainsprings and true significance ?"

"Never. Because it is chimerical. It does not exist. Men are not born equally equipped. They are born noble or ignoble, sane or foolish, strong or weak, according to the blend of natures, fortuitous to them, which calls them into existence."

The Baron drank, and set down his glass. He dabbed his lips with a fine handkerchief.

"That is merely metaphysical, and I am being practical. It is possible to postulate a condition of equality. It has, in fact, been postulated by the apostles of that other singular delusion, liberty. The idea of equality is a by-product of the sentiment of envy. Since it must always prove beyond human power to raise the inferior mass to a superior stratum, apostles of equality must ever be inferiors seeking to reduce their betters to their own level. It follows that a nation that once admits this doctrine of equality will be dragged by it to the level, moral, intellectual and political, of its most worthless class. This within practical limitations. Because, after all, such qualities as nobility, intelligence, learning, virtue and strength cannot be stripped from those who possess them, to be cast into a common-wealth and shared by all. The only things of which men can be deprived in that way and to that end are their material possessions.

"Your revolutionaries, these dishonest rogues who delude the ignorant masses with the cant of liberty, equality and fraternity and with promises of a millennium which they know can never be achieved, are well aware of this. They know that there is no power that can lift from the gutter those who have inherited it. The only attainable equality is one which will reduce the remainder of the nation to that gutter, so as to make things still more uncomfortable for the deluded unfortunates who writhe there. But meanwhile, plying their cant, deceiving the masses with their false promises, these men prosper in themselves. That is all their aim : the ease they envied in those they have pulled down, the

wealth they coveted which procures this ease. These things they ensure for themselves in unstinted measure."

"But is that possible in the France of to-day? Are the men who made the revolution really deriving material profit from it?"

"What is there in this to astonish you? Is not the Assembly recruited from the gutter, from famished failures in the law, like Desmoulins and Danton, from starveling journalists like Marat and Hébert, and unfrocked capuchins like Chabot. Shall these men who are now in the saddle suddenly repress the envy which inspired them, or stifle the covetousness which went hand in hand with that envy? They are all dishonest and corrupt, and if this applies to those in command, shall it apply less to the underlings?" He laughed. "I doubt if there is a man in the whole National Convention whom I could not buy."

André-Louis was very thoughtful. "I understand a great deal that hitherto had not occurred to me," he said slowly. "When this movement first began, when I played my part in it, it was a movement of idealists who sought to correct abuses, to bring to men an equality of opportunity and an equality before the law which in the past had been denied them."

"Nearly all those visionaries have been swept away by the tide from the gutter to which they opened the floodgates. A handful remains perhaps. The men of the Gironde, lawyers all, and men of ability who make a great parade of republican virtue. But even they have shown themselves dishonest. They voted for the death of the King, against their principles, and merely so as to ensure that they might cling to power. Oh, believe me, I wrought no miracle in preserving myself in Paris, and it will require no miracle to safeguard me there again."

"You are returning?"

"Of course. Shall I grow rusty in exile while there's work to be done at home? I may have failed to save the King, thanks to that blundering, jealous fool d'Enragues, who kept me wasting time in Coblenz when I should have been in Paris; but I shall hope to succeed better with the Queen."

"You mean to attempt her rescue?"

"I do not think it offers difficulties that gold and steel will not overcome."

The wine was finished. André-Louis stood up. His dark eyes considered the resolute, carelessly smiling countenance of the Baron.

"Monsieur de Batz," he said, "minimize it as you will, I think you are the bravest man I have ever known."

"You honour me, Monsieur Moreau. Have you the ear of the Regent?"

"I! Indeed, no."

"A pity! You might persuade him of the virtue you discern in me. He has no great opinion of me at present. But I shall hope to improve it. I owe it to myself."

They talked no more that day, but they met again as if by mutual attraction on the morrow. And then it was André-Louis who talked, and the Baron who listened.

"I have been pondering what you told me yesterday, Monsieur de Batz. If you accurately represent the situation, this revolutionary stronghold is vulnerable, it seems to me, at several points. My interest springs from my own aims. That is common enough if not commonly admitted. I am frank, Monsieur le Baron. All my hopes in life have become bound up with the restoration of the monarchy, and I see no ground to expect that the restoration of the Bourbons will ever be brought about as a result of European intervention. If the monarchy is to be restored in France, the restoration must come as a result of a movement from the inside. Almost I perceive—or seem to perceive—from what you told me yesterday how this movement might be given an impetus."

"How?" The Baron was alert.

André-Louis did not immediately answer. He sat in silence, considering, as if passing his ideas in review before giving them utterance. Then he looked round and up at the railed galleries above the common-room. They were quite alone. It was still too early in the day for the inhabitants of Hamm to come there to their beer and cards and dice and backgammon.

He leaned across the narrow yellow table, directly facing the Baron, and there was a glitter in his dark eyes, a faint stir of blood on his prominent cheek-bones.

"You'll say this is a madman's dream."

"I've dreamt a good many of them myself. Take heart."

"Two things that you said yesterday have remained with me to be the seed of thought. One was your exposition of the general dishonesty, the corruptibility of those in power to-day in France. The other was your assertion that if the chaos existed there which abroad it is believed exists, the revolution would burn itself out in a few days."

"Do you doubt either statement?"

"No, Monsieur le Baron. I perceive that power in France has been tossed like a ball from hand to hand until it is now grasped by the lowest men in the nation who can pretend to any

governing ability. It can be tossed no farther ; that is to say no farther down."

"There are still the Girondins," said de Batz slowly. "They hardly fit your description."

"But it follows, from what else you said, that they will be swept away by the natural processes of the revolution."

"Yes. That seems inevitable."

"The men of the National Convention maintain themselves by the confidence of the populace. The populace trusts them implicitly, believes in their stark honesty. Other governments have been pulled down because the men who formed them were exposed for corrupt self-seekers, plundering the nation to their own personal profit. This corruption the populace believes to be responsible for the squalor of its own lot. Now all is changed. The people believe that those rogues have been cast out, driven from France, guillotined, destroyed ; they believe that their places have been filled by these honest, incorruptible men who would open their veins to give drink to the thirsty people rather than misappropriate a liard of the national treasury."

"A nice phrase," said the Baron. "Pitched in the right key for the mob."

André-Louis let the interruption pass. "If it could be revealed to the people that these last hopes of theirs are more corrupt than any that have gone before ; if the people could be persuaded that by cant, hypocrisy and lies these revolutionaries have imposed themselves upon the nation merely so that they may fatten upon it, what would happen ?"

"If that could be proved, it would of course destroy them. But how to prove it ?"

"All things that are true are susceptible of proof."

"As a general rule, no doubt. But these fellows are too secure to be assailed in that fashion."

Again André-Louis was sententious. "No man is secure who is dishonest in a position held upon faith in his honesty. Monsieur, as you have said, sits there in his wooden *châlet* composing reports for consumption in the courts of Europe. Would not his ends be better served by reports for consumption by the populace of France ? Is it so difficult to arouse suspicion of men in power even when they are believed to be honest ?"

The Baron was stirred. "Name of a name of a name ! But now you utter a truth, *mon petit*. The reputation of a man in power is as delicate as a woman's."

"You see. Let scandal loose against these knaves. Support it by evidence of their dishonesties. Then one of two things

must follow : either a reaction in favour of the return of the old governing classes, or else chaos, utter anarchy and the complete collapse of all the machinery of State, with the inevitable result of famine and exhaustion. Thus the revolution burns itself out."

"My God !" said de Batz in a voice of awe. He took his head in his hands, and sat brooding there, his eyes veiled. At last he flashed them upon the eager face of the man opposite. "A madman's dream, as you say ; and yet a dream that might be possible of fulfilment. The conception of a Dæmon."

"I make you a gift of it."

But the Baron shook his head. "It would need the mind that conceived it to oversee its execution, to elaborate its details. The task is one for you, Monsieur Moreau."

"Say rather for Scaramouche. It asks his peculiar gifts."

"Regard that as you please. Consider the results to yourself if achievement were to crown the effort, as well it may, if boldly made. Yours will be the position of a kingmaker."

"Scaramouche the Kingmaker !"

De Batz disregarded the sneer. "And yours the great rewards that await a kingmaker."

"You believe, then, in the gratitude of princes, after all."

"I believe in a kingmaker's ability, to enforce payment of his wages."

André-Louis fell into a daydream. It would be a sweet satisfaction to have these men who had treated him so cavalierly owe their restoration to his genius and lie in his debt for it ; sweet too, to prevail by his own effort, and rise by it to the eminence which he accounted his natural place in a world of numskulls, an eminence which he need have no hesitation in inviting Aline to share.

The Baron aroused him to realities. "Well ?" His voice rasped with an eagerness that amounted to anxiety.

André-Louis smiled at him across the table. "I will take the risk of it, I think."

CHAPTER XIII

DEPARTURE

MONSIEUR DE BATZ stood once more in the presence of the Regent, in that plain room in the chalet at Hamm

He stood before Monsieur's writing-table, in a rhomb of sunlight that fell from the leaded panes of the window on Monsieur's left. Windows and door were tight shut and the stale atmosphere of the room was heavy with the earthy smell of burning peat from the clay stove. From the eaves outside came a steady drip of melting snow, for the thaw had set in that morning.

Three other men were in attendance. The delicate Comte d'Avaray, his English air accentuated by plain blue riding-coat, buckskins and knee boots with reversed tops, was seated near the middle of the room, on the Baron's left. With him sat the dark, showy, slimly vigorous Comte d'Entragues. The Regent's brother, the Comte d'Artois, slight, elegant and restless, paced to and fro across the room. He had been invited to attend so soon as the trend of the Baron's proposal was apparent.

The Baron had been speaking, and now that he had ceased silence was maintained until the Regent, who had thoughtfully set biting the end of his quill, invited the opinion of Monsieur d'Entragues on what they had just heard. D'Entragues was at no pains to dissemble his contempt.

"A wild enterprise. Utterly desperate. A gambler's throw."

Monsieur d'Artois halted in his pacing. He could assume airs of an intelligence which he did not possess. He assumed them now, preserving a wise silence.

The Regent levelled the glance of his full eyes upon de Batz.

"Agreed," said the Baron easily. "Oh agreed. But, for desperate ills, desperate remedies."

Solemnly Monsieur d'Artois corrected him. "It cannot rightly be said that this ill is desperate. It is very far from desperate."

"I allude, monseigneur, to the situation of the royal prisoners. That, I think, it will be agreed is desperate enough, and time will not stand still for them. There is not a day to be lost if her majesty is to be rescued from the terrible fate which has already overtaken the late King. Monsieur d'Entragues describes this as a gambler's throw. It is admitted. But what alternative does Monsieur d'Entragues propose if the Queen and her family are not to be abandoned to their fate?"

D'Entragues shrugged impatiently, and crossed his legs again.

"I think you should answer that," said Monsieur d'Artois in his cold level voice.

D'Entragues complied, perforce. "So far as an attempt to rescue her majesty is concerned, my views are no reason why it should not be made. It is even heroic of Monsieur de Batz to stake, as he will be doing, his head upon the gamble. But when

it comes to the other, wider issues with which Monsieur de Batz wishes to concern himself, I must frankly say that it is disconcerting to the agents already acting under my directions to have this independent meddling."

"So that," said Monsieur ponderously, "you would advise that whilst we sanction the Baron's enterprise on behalf of the Queen, we do not authorize him to take any action having a wider scope?"

"That is what I have the honour to advise, monseigneur."

And this might finally have closed the matter but for a gentle interpolation at that moment by d'Avaray, who, if he seldom intervened in affairs, never intervened without commanding the Regent's attention.

"But what," he asked, "if the opportunity for a bold stroke should present itself? Is it to be neglected?"

D'Entraques suppressed his annoyance at this opposition from the Regent's favourite, whom he detested, yet whom he dared not openly flout. He spoke as smoothly as he could.

"If the opportunity presents itself, my agents will be at hand to take advantage of it. I can assure you, messieurs, that they have the very fullest instructions from me."

But de Batz was emboldened by the unexpected support of Monsieur d'Avaray. "Suppose that they do not perceive an opportunity which presents itself to me, am I still on that account to neglect it? It is not lucky, monseigneur, to let opportunity go unheeded. If I attempt and fail, I do not perceive how this can thwart the measures being taken by Monsieur d'Entraques' agents."

"The measures might be identical," cried d'Entraques, without waiting for leave to speak. "And a clumsy failure on your part would create alarm, directing vigilance to the very point where we least desire it, where it may defeat us."

Thus began an argument which endured for a full hour by the clock. Monsieur de Batz remained outwardly calm before this crass opposition, whilst Monsieur d'Entraques, growing heated and at moments, consequently, reckless in his arguments, laid himself open to several palpable hits.

The end of it was that their highnesses, grudgingly and with all the air of bestowing a high favour condescended to hear Monsieur de Batz in detail upon the plan which he pretended to have formed for the overthrow of the revolutionary government. But now Monsieur de Batz almost wrecked his chances of risking his neck in the service of these ungracious Princes by stating that he would prefer to unfold his plans with the attendance of

one who was largely their author, and who was to be his close associate in their execution.

Peremptorily he was asked for the name of this person. When he had supplied it the Princes and their two advisers looked at one another whilst Monsieur d'Artois expressed the opinion that they should know something more about this Monsieur Moreau before investing him with authority to act on their behalf.

Still Monsieur de Batz betrayed no sign of his impatience, which says much for his self-control. He went out to fetch André-Louis, who awaited the summons.

Their highnesses considered the neat, trim figure without enthusiasm. Monsieur d'Artois, indeed, who had not remembered him by name but recognized him now at sight, frowned upon him in silence. It was the Regent who addressed him.

"Monsieur de Batz has told us, monsieur of your willingness to co-operate with him in certain measures which he believes are calculated to serve our interests in France. He tells us that you are partly the author of the plan upon which he proposes to act, but of which we have yet to learn the details." And with that chill welcome he turned to Monsieur de Batz. "Now Monsieur le Baron, we are listening."

The Baron was brisk. "Our plan is not so much to clean out the Augean stable as to reveal its noisomeness in such a manner to the people of France as to induce them to rise up and themselves perform the necessary work of purification." Briefly he sketched the main principles which would guide their task and some of the measures by which they proposed so to corrupt those very corruptible men that their corruption could no longer be concealed.

Monsieur d'Artois became interested. D'Avaray's delicate face was flushed with enthusiasm. D'Entragues continued coldly hostile, whilst Monsieur turned grave eyes from one to another as if seeking in their countenances the guidance of the reflection of their thoughts.

Monsieur d'Artois moved across to stand beside his brother's chair. Monsieur's glance interrogated him.

"The conception is of an engaging audacity," said the younger prince. "Sometimes audacity succeeds. What more can one say?"

"I perceive," said the Regent. "no reasons against the attempt being made. Do you, d'Entragues?"

D'Entragues shrugged. "None beyond those which I have already had the honour to express to your highness. If I were to

attach to Monsieur de Batz a man of my own, who is now under my hand here, I should have some assurance that there would be no working at cross-purposes with my own agents in Paris."

Monsieur nodded solemnly. "What says Monsieur de Batz to that?"

Monsieur de Batz smiled. "I welcome every recruit, always provided that he possesses the qualities of courage and intelligence which the work demands."

"I employ no others, monsieur," said d'Entragues with arrogance.

"Could I permit myself to suppose it, monsieur?"

And then Monsieur d'Artois, who had been frowning, interposed. "There is yet another quality necessary. I ask myself does Monsieur Moreau possess it?"

The Regent, who had been pensively smiling, looked up as if suddenly startled. But his brother ran on, fixing his glance keenly and coldly upon André-Louis.

"I call to mind, Monsieur Moreau, a conversation we had at Schönbornlust, in the course of which you expressed yourself a constitutionalist. Hitherto it has been my invariable rule to demand a greater purity of ideals than that in those who follow us. We do not aim at restoring a monarchy to France if it is to be a constitutional monarchy. We shall re-establish there a monarchy in the ancient forms, persuaded as we are that had our unfortunate brother made no departure from this, the present unhappy state of things would never have arisen. You will understand, Monsieur Moreau, that, inspired by such ideals, we must hesitate to enlist the services of any man who does not fully share them. You smile, Monsieur Moreau?"

André-Louis asked himself who would not have smiled at this pompous address from a Prince Lackland to a man who was proposing to get himself killed in his service. But he made a sharp recovery of his gravity.

"Monseigneur," he replied, "assuming that we are successful in this forlorn hope, the extent of our success will be to overthrow the existing régime and open the way for the restoration. What form the monarchy will take when restored will hardly rest with us——"

"Maybe, maybe," the Prince coldly interrupted him. "But we must still observe a discrimination, a fastidiousness even, in the agents we enlist. We owe this to ourselves, to the dignity of our station."

"I understand" said André-Louis frosty in his turn, "the

purity of your ideals demands a purity in the weapons you employ."

"You express it very happily, Monsieur Moreau. I thank you. You will perceive that we have no other guarantee of the sincerity of those who act as our agents."

"I venture to think, monseigneur, that I could supply a guarantee of my own."

Monsieur d'Artois seemed surprised by the answer. "If you please," he said.

"The best guarantee a man can give of his sincerity is to show that his interest lies in keeping faith. Now with the restoration of the monarchy is bound up the restoration of various nobles to their confiscated domains. Amongst these there is my godfather, Monsieur de Kercadiou, who will be restored to Gavrilac. He has imposed it upon me that I must wait until this is accomplished before I may fulfil my dearest hope, which is to marry Mademoiselle de Kercadiou. You will perceive, monseigneur, my interest in advancing the cause of the monarchy so that I may advance my own, which is my chief concern."

Now that is not the way to address a prince, and no prince was ever more conscious that he was a prince than Monsieur le Comte d'Artois.

Cold anger quivered in the restrained voice in which he answered. "I perceive it clearly, monsieur. It explains to me all that I considered obscure in the aims of a man of your history and sentiments, which in themselves are not calculated to inspire confidence."

André-Louis bowed formally. "I am dismissed, I think."

Coldly Monsieur d'Artois inclined his head in assent. De Batz in a fury made a clicking sound with his tongue. But before he could commit himself to any solecism that must have made matters worse, the Regent, to the surprise of all, had intervened. He was almost nervous in manner. His florid face seemed to have lost some of its colour. The podgy hand he extended as he spoke could be seen to shake.

"Ah, but wait! Wait, Monsieur Moreau! A moment, I beg!"

His brother looked down at him in angry uncomprehending astonishment. It was unbelievable that it was the Regent of France who had spoken. Monsieur, usually so cold, correct and formal, so fully imbued with a sense of the dignity of his office, so observant of etiquette that even to give audience in this wooden but at Hamm he donned the ribbon of the Holy Ghost and hung a dress sword at his side, appeared completely to have forgotten what was due to him. Otherwise he could not have addressed

in that tone of almost scared intercession a man who had permitted himself to be insolent in speech and carriage. To Monsieur d'Artois this was the end of the world. Not for a throne could he have believed that his brother would so abase himself.

"Monseigneur!" he exclaimed in a voice that expressed his horror and dismay.

But all the majesty seemed to have deserted the Regent. He spoke mildly, conciliatorily. "We must not be ungenerous. We must keep in view that Monsieur Moreau offers a very gallant service." He seemed only just to have become aware of it. "It would be ungenerous either to decline it, or to look too closely into—ah—the general sentiments by which Monsieur Moreau is—ah—inspired."

"You think so?" said Monsieur d'Artois tartly, his brows drawn together at the root of his Bourbon nose.

"I think so," he was curtly answered, in a tone of finality, a tone which seemed clearly to imply that it was the speaker who occupied the throne and whose will was paramount. "Myself, I am very grateful to Monsieur Moreau for his readiness to serve us by an undertaking whose perils I do not underestimate. If, as we must hope, the undertaking is successful, I shall express that gratitude liberally. The extent of my liberality will be governed only by the political opinions then held by Monsieur Moreau. He will perceive how inevitable this is. But until then I do not think that his past opinions and activities need concern us. I repeat, it would be ungenerous to permit them to do so."

The amazement had deepened in his audience. This unusual and sudden degree of graciousness bewildered them, with the possible exception of the keen-witted alert Monsieur d'Entraques, who thought that he understood the Regent's anxieties.

Monsieur d'Artois was crimson, his vanity affronted by an opposition which had been displayed almost in the terms of a rebuke. He took a haughty tone.

"The repetition is quite unnecessary. I was not likely to forget that so uncompromising a word as 'ungenerous' had been used. I will not dwell upon this now. Since our views of this matter are so wide asunder, I can have no further part in it." And abruptly he turned upon his heel.

The Regent scowled. "Monseigneur," he cried, "you are not to forget that I occupy the place of the King."

"Your highness leaves me in no danger of forgetting it," was the younger prince's bitter rejoinder, disloyal at once to the representative of royalty and to the dead Sovereign. On that he went out, slamming the door after him.

The Regent made a clumsy effort to dispel the discomfort left by that departure

"My brother, messieurs, takes in these matters an unpromising attitude, which we must respect, even if we do not feel called upon to share it." He sighed. "There is a rigidity in his ideals, which are very exalted, very noble." He paused, and then changed his tone. "Little remains, I think, to be said. I have already expressed, Monsieur de Batz, my appreciation of the endeavours which you and Monsieur Moreau are about to exert. For anything else that you require, Monsieur d'Entragues is at your service, and I am happy that with him, too, an understanding should have been reached."

"There is one other matter monseigneur," said de Batz. "Funds."

His highness was startled. He flung up his hands. "In the name of Heaven, Monsieur de Batz! Do you ask us for money?"

"No monseigneur. Merely for authority to provide it." And in answer to the Regent's stare he smiled significantly. "In the usual way, monseigneur."

It was clear that his highness understood. But he was still not comfortable. He looked at d'Entragues as if for guidance.

D'Entragues thrust out a deprecatory lip. "You know, monseigneur, the trouble there has been already, and the undertakings you have given."

"But those," ventured Monsieur de Batz, "apply only here abroad, and not to France."

The Regent nodded and considered. "You give me your word, Monsieur le Baron, that these assignats will be employed only in France?"

"Freely, monseigneur. I have still enough gold for our journey across the Rhine."

"Very well then. You must do what is necessary. But you realize the danger?"

De Batz smiled confidently. "As for danger, it is the least of those we shall confront and I employ very skilful hands, monseigneur."

Upon that his highness closed the audience with a few words of valediction, and graciously proffered his hand to be kissed by those two adventurers.

Outside in the sunshine, as they squelched their way through the thawing snow, the Gascon loosed at last his annoyance in a volley of profanity.

"If it were not that I rate the game above the stakes I should have told their highnesses in round terms to go to the devil,

together with that infernal pimp d'Enragues. God of my life ! To have to go on one's knees to beg the honour of being permitted to get one's self killed in their service !"

André-Louis smiled upon his fury. "You do not realize the honour of dying in their cause. Have patience with them. They are merely players of parts. And Destiny has given them parts too big for their puny wits. Fortunately for our self-respect Monsieur turned gracious at the end."

"Which provides the morning's most surprising event. Hitherto he has been the more intransigent, the more self-sufficient of the twain."

André-Louis brushed the mystery aside. "Ah, well ! I am content that my dismissal was not confirmed. I have my own interests to serve in the adventure. For I am Scaramouche, remember. Not a knight-errant."

But it was as a knight-errant that Monsieur de Kercadiou and Aline regarded him when they heard to what desperate adventure he was pledged. Aline perceived only the dangers, and that evening after supper, when for a little while she was alone with André-Louis, she gave expression to her fears for him.

He glowed at this fresh proof of her tenderness even whilst distressed by her distress. He set himself to tranquillize her. He dwelt upon the immunity which circumspection ensured, freely quoting de Batz on the subject. But the mention of the Baron's name was an incitement to her.

"That man !" she cried, a world of condemnation in her voice.

"Oh, but a very gallant gentleman," André-Louis defended him.

"A reckless harebrain, dangerous to all who are associated with him. He makes me afraid, André. He will not be lucky to you. I feel it. I know it."

"Intuitions ?" he said tolerantly, smiling down upon her where she stood against him, her face upturned to his.

"Ah, do not sneer, André," Agitation had brought her, who rarely wept, to the verge of tears. "If you love me, André, you will not go."

"I go because I love you. I go so that at last I may win you for my wife. Honours there will be, no doubt, and material gains to crown success. But these stand for nothing in my calculations. It is you I go to win."

"Where is the need, since I am won already ? For the rest, we could wait."

It was anguish to deny the intercession in those dear eyes. He could but remind her that his word was pledged, doubly

pledged : to the Regent as well as to de Batz. He urged her to be brave and to have in him some of the confidence which he had in himself.

She promised at last that she would try, and then to her promise added : "Yet if you go, my André, I know that I shall never see you again. I have a premonition of evil."

"Dear child ! That is but a fancy born of your distress."

"It is not. I need you. I need you near me. To guard me."

"To guard you ? But from what ?"

"I do not know. There is some danger. I sense it about me—about us if we are apart. It is instinctive."

"And yet, dear love, you had no such instinct when I proposed to go to Dresden."

"Ah, but Dresden is near at hand. At need a message could bring you to me, or I could go to you. But once you are in France you are as one trapped in a cage, cut off from the remainder of the world. André ! André ! Is it, indeed, too late ?"

"Too late for what ?" said Monsieur de Kercadiou, who entered at that moment.

She told him bluntly. He was shocked, outraged. Had she so little loyalty, so little sense of every loyal man's duty in this dreadful time that she should weaken André's heroic resolve by a maudlin opposition ? For once Monsieur de Kercadiou was really angry, and he stormed upon her as he had never yet stormed in all the years that she had been under his tutelage.

Limp, shamed, defeated, she withdrew ; and next morning André-Louis rode out of Hamm to take the road to France.

With him rode Monsieur de Batz and a Monsieur Armand de Langéac, a young gentleman of a Languédoc family attached to them by Monsieur d'Entragues.

They were disposed to be light-hearted. But in the ears of André-Louis rang ever Aline's cry : "If you go, my André, I know that I shall never see you again."

CHAPTER XIV

MOLOCH

MOLOCH stood before the Palace of the Tuileries in the brilliant sunshine of a June morning, and raised his hideous voice in a

cry for blood. The sprawling incarnation of him that filled to overflowing the Place du Carrousel, was made up of some eighty thousand men under arms: sectionary National Guards, battalions of the new army about to set out for the Vendée, and ragged patriots brandishing musket, pike or sabre, the bloodthirsty scourings of the streets. It was just such a mob as André-Louis had seen in this very place on the memorable and terrible tenth of August of the previous year.

On that occasion they had come to storm a palace housing a king, so that they might impose upon him their mutinous will, shaped and directed by the incendiaries who employed them as a weapon. To-day, once more in an insurrection that had been craftily engineered, they came in their thousands to storm this same palace which now housed the National Convention elected by the people themselves to replace the departed monarch.

Then it had been Danton, the great tribune, massive and overwhelming in body, brain and voice, the cyclops of Madame Roland's detestation, who had inspired and led the populace. To-day its leader was a poor creature of weakly frame, shabbily dressed, his head swathed like a buccaneer's in a red kerchief, from which black greasy rags of hair hung about a livid Semitic countenance. He laboured in his walk, setting his feet wide. He was the Citizen Jean-Paul Marat, the President of the powerful Jacobin Club, surgeon, philanthropist and reformer, commonly styled the People's Friend, from the title of the scurrilous journal with which he poisoned the popular mind. And Danton was amongst those against whom to-day he led this mob, which ten months ago Danton had led in this same place.

The situation was not without a terrible humour; and Monsieur de Batz, standing prominently on a horse-block by the courtyard wall with André-Louis beside him, smiled grimly as he looked on, well-pleased with the climax for which these two had striven and intrigued.

This is not to say that the ruin of the Girondin party, which was now as good as encompassed—the only alternative being the ruin of the entire Convention—was the work of de Batz and André-Louis. But it is beyond doubt that their part in it had been important. Without the grains of sand which they had flung at moments into the scales when these were too nicely balanced between victory and defeat, it is not impossible that the Girondins, who combined intelligence with courage, would have overthrown their opponents and established by the rule of moderation for which they stood, the law and order necessary to save the State. But from the moment when they first rendered

themselves vulnerable by procuring the arrest of the rabble's idol Marat, de Batz, with the assistance of André-Louis, had worked dil gently through his agents to fan the resentment into a fury in the face of which no jury dared to convict the offending journalist.

Marat's acquittal had been a triumph. Laurel-crowned the mob had borne him to the Convention, so that there he might vent his spite against the men who, inspired by decency, had sought his ruin.

After this had come the laudable attempt of the Girondins to curb the insolence of the Commune of Paris, which by imposing its will upon the elected representatives of the people of France made a mock of government. They compelled the establishment of the Commission of Twelve, to examine the conduct of the municipality and control it.

The situation became strained. The party of the Mountain, with Robespierre at its head, feared lest the Girondins should recapture in the Convention the domination which they had held in the Legislative Assembly. Certainly the available talent lay with this band of lawyers and intellectuals, led by the formidable eloquent Vergniaud, that shining light of the Bordeaux bar, whom someone has called the Cicero from Aquitaine. In debate Robespierre could produce on his side no champions to hold the lists against these. In a man of Robespierre's temperament this was cause enough for rancour, without the additional rancour he bore the Girondins for having excluded him from office when theirs was the power. But for outside influence these men of the Gironde must have prevailed. Outside influence, however, was at work, and none more active in it than de Batz, at once directed and seconded by André-Louis. It was André-Louis who, employing his gifts of authorship, composed those pamphlets printed in the presses of the *Ami du Peuple* and widely circulated, in which the Girondins were charged with counter-revolutionary conspiracy. Their moderation was represented as a betrayal of their trust; the Commission of Twelve set up by their influence was shown to be an attempt to hobble the Commune, whose sole aim was to destroy despotism. Subtly was it suggested that the royalist victories in the Vendée, the reactionary insurrections at Marseilles and Bordeaux and the defeat of the Republican Army in Belgium, ending in General Dumouriez's defection and flight, were the results of Girondist moderation and weakness at a time when National necessity called for the strongest, sternest measures.

Such had been the poison sedulously pumped into Parisian veins, and here at last was the result in this rising of the inflamed

Parisian body : eighty thousand men and sixty guns, commanded by the ridiculous General Henriot, who sat his horse with obvious discomfort, to back Marat's demand that the traitors—and he was prepared to name twenty-two of them—should be given up.

There was a sudden movement in the crowd, and cries of : "They come !"

A group of men had made its appearance at the door of the Palace. It advanced, others crowding after it, to the number of perhaps two hundred, a considerable proportion of the whole body of representatives. At the head of these men walked that tall graceful libertine, Hérault de Séchelles, President of the Convention at this time. He wore his plumed hat, as was usual in the chamber when proceedings were out of order.

Henriot thrust his horse forward a few paces. Séchelles halted, and held up his hand for silence. He carried a paper, and he raised his resonant voice to read it. It was a decree just passed by the staggered body of legislators, commanding the instant withdrawal of this armed insurrectionary force. But as Robespierre had said (or was it Chabot ?) : "There is no virtue where there is no fear." And the Government was without the means to arouse the fear that inculcates virtue.

"I charge you to obey !" cried Séchelles, lowering his paper and delivering himself resolutely.

"You have my orders, Hérault," he was truculently answered by the mounted General.

"Your orders !" Séchelles paused. There was a murmur of indignation behind him in the ranks of the representatives. "What does the people want ? The Convention has no thought or concern save for the public welfare."

"What it wants, Hérault ? You well know what it wants." The General's tone was conciliatory. "We know that you are a good patriot, Hérault, that you belong to the Mountain. Will you answer for it upon your head that the twenty-two traitors in the Convention will be delivered up within twenty-four hours ?"

The president stood firm. "It is not," he began, "for the people to dictate thus to the august body of . . ."

His voice was drowned in a roar, sudden as a thunder-clap, and then, like thunder, protracted in a long roll of furious sound that waxed and waned. Above the sea of heads, arms were thrust up brandishing weapons.

Hérault de Séchelles stood firm. Behind him his agitated fellow-representatives looked on, conceiving that they were to fare even as in this very place those had fared against whom ten months ago they had loosed the fury of this same populace.

But Henriot, more uncomfortable than ever on a charger made restive by the din yet contrived to pacify and silence Moloch.

"The sovereign people," he said, "is not here to listen to phrases, but to issue its sovereign commands."

Séchelles played his last card. He advanced a step drawing himself up, and flinging out an arm in a superb gesture of authority. His voice rang like a trumpet-call.

"Soldiers! In the name of the Nation and the law, I order you to arrest this rebel."

Moloch curbed his derision and held his breath to hear the answer.

Henriot drew his sabre.

"We take no orders from you. Return to your place, and deliver up the deputies demanded by the people." In the bright sunshine the flourish of his blade made a lightning-flash above his head. "Cannoneers, to your posts!"

There was an obeying movement about the guns trained on the Palace. Matches smouldered. Hérault de Séchelles and his crowd of deputies hastily confusedly, retreated and vanished into the building.

De Batz burst into laughter, which found an echo among those about him. Grinning ragamuffins looked round and up at him approvingly. Obscenely-decked jests were tossed to and fro.

The Baron waited to see the tragedy played out. Nor was his patience tried. Marat, supported by some scoundrels, had followed the deputies into the hall of the Convention, there to name the twenty-two whose exclusion was demanded. Resistance to such force was idle. Robespierre and a small group of the party of the Mountain passed the decree for the arrest of the Girondins. The main body of the assembly sat awed, humiliated, appalled by this dictation to which they were compelled to submit.

Thereupon Moloch raised the siege and the members of the Convention, virtually prisoners until that moment were allowed to depart. They filed out to the accompaniment of the ironical cheers of the multitude.

The Baron de Batz descended from his horse-block, and took André-Louis by the arm. "That rings down the curtain on the first act. Come. There is no more to be done here."

They entered the human stream of the departing mob and were borne by it into the cool shade of the gardens, where at last they won release. Thence by the Terrace of the Feuillants and

the Rue St. Thomas du Louvre, they made their way towards the Rue de Ménars.

Here in the heart of the Section Lepelletier of the Commune of Paris, the Baron rented in the name of his servant, Biret-Tissot, the first floor of number seven. The locality was well chosen for a man in his precarious position. Of all the Paris sections, the Section Lepelletier was the least revolutionary. Consequently its members would have few revolutionary scruples against selling themselves. Of how widely they were in the pay of de Batz—from Pottier de Lille, the secretary of the Revolutionary Committee of the section, down to Captain Cortey, who commanded its National Guard—André-Louis had already come to realize.

As they went, the two fell naturally into talk of what was done. André-Louis had been rather gloomily silent.

"You have no scruples?" he asked at last. "Your conscience makes you no reproaches?"

"Reproaches!"

"These men, after all, are the cleanest, the best, the most upright and honest in that galley."

"They're in the galley no longer. They are overboard, and the craft will go the more surely on to the rocks without them. Wasn't this your aim?"

"True. And yet ruthlessly to sacrifice men of such worth . . ."

"Were they less ruthless in sacrificing the King?"

"They did not mean to send him to the guillotine. They did not desire his death. They would have saved him by suspending sentence."

"The more ruthless were they in voting for his death. A cowardly act to save their waning popularity. Bah! If you have pity, save it for worthier objects than this crew of windy ideologues, who are ridden by Madame Roland, from Buzot her lover (in the spirit, so she pretends) to that pedant, her spiritual cuckold of a husband. To this in the end, by one road or another, must they have come. We have but shortened the journey for them."

"What will be the end of them?"

"You have seen it. The rest is not important. It is odd to reflect that there is not a man amongst them who was not one of the architects of this Republic upon whose altar they are now sacrificed. Lanjuinais, the founder of the Jacobin Club; Barbaroux, who brought the Marseillaise to the work of revolution; St. Etienne, responsible for the shaping of the civil constitution;

Brissot, who intoxicated men with his revolutionary writings; Fauchet, the apostle of the Revolutionary Church; and the others who encompassed the overthrow of the throne. Are these men for a royalist's compassion? They're gone, and with them departs all chance of law and order in the State. The very manner of their going is the ruin of the Convention. Henceforth the august law-givers are the slaves of the sovereign rabble, which to-day has discovered its sovereignty. In the exercise of this sovereignty it must of necessity perish, for anarchy is of necessity self-destructive." After a pause he added on a note of elation, gripping his companion's arm: "This is monarchy's greatest hour since the Bastille was taken four years ago. Those who remain are easily swept away by the same forces that have removed the Girondins."

He clapped the gloomy André-Louis on the shoulder. "Rejoice, then, in Heaven's name, at this vindication of the theories with which you startled me at Hamm."

CHAPTER XV

PRELUDE

ANDRÉ-LOUIS and the Baron dined that afternoon with Benoît, the wealthy Angévin banker in the Rue des Orties.

In Benoît's well-appointed establishment, as in his own well-nourished, hearty person, there was little to proclaim the levelling doctrines of democracy, of which he enjoyed the reputation of being a pillar. If his movements, gestures, accent and turn of speech, and the very gravity of his bonhomie, suggested a plebeian origin, he yet bore himself with a general air of genial consequence. He was a man to whom wealth had brought assurance and self-confidence and the poise permitted by a sense of security. Nor was this security shaken by the successive earthquakes that disturbed the nation, and in the course of which men of birth and quality were being constantly engulfed. Together with the millions in his safes, there was that which in these unquiet and dangerous times amounted to an even more

precious treasure in the shape of records of transactions on behalf of some of the architects of the revolution. There was no party in the State some of whose members had not operated through Benoît and profited by the operations to an extent the revelation of which might imperil their heads. Recommended to him one by another, they had come to regard him as a "safe man". And Benoît on his side knew himself for a safe man in another sense, since he held these patriots as hostages for his safety.

Benoît could have told the world the precise reason for Danton's anxiety to decree the sacredness of property; he could have explained exactly how the great tribune and powerful apostle of equality was becoming so considerable a landowner in the district of Arcis. He could have disclosed how that dishonest deputy Philippe Fabre, who called himself d'Eglantine, had made thirty-six thousand livres on a government contract for army boots whose cardboard soles had quickly gone to pieces. He could have shown how Lacroix and at least a dozen other national representatives, who a couple of years ago had been starveling lawyers, were now able to take their ease and keep their horses.

But Benoît was a "safe man", and to make assurance doubly sure he wasted no opportunity of adding to his precious hostages. Like a fat financial spider he span his stout web in the Rue des Orties and enmeshed in it many a speculative fly from among all these hungry, avid politicians, most of whom, in the opinion of de Batz, merely required to be tempted so as to succumb.

Of all de Batz's associates in this campaign of mine and sap which André-Louis had devised, none was more highly prized than Benoît of Angers. And since de Batz had shown him that the advantage of their association could be reciprocal, Benoît prized the Baron as highly in his turn. Also, being a man of some shrewd vision, it is probable that he reposed no faith in the perdurance of the present régime. Whilst avoiding politics, he saw to it, as a prudent man of affairs, that he possessed friends in both camps.

To-day's invitation to dinner was no idle act of courtesy. Benoît's compatriot Delaunay, the representative for Angers in the National Convention, was to be of the party. Delaunay was in need of money. He had just succumbed to the charms of Mademoiselle Descoings, the actress. But the Descoings was not to be cheaply acquired even by a National Representative. She had lately learnt a lesson on the subject. For a brief season she had been the mistress of that coarse scoundrel François

Chabot, dazzled at first by his prominence in the party of the Mountain. Intimate acquaintance with him had revealed to her that the effulgence of his deputyship was far from compensating for the unpleasantness of his habits and the sordid circumstances in which the lack of money compelled him to live. So she had gone her ways, and Delaunay was now discovering to his torment that the association with Chabot had taught her to be exacting and exigent.

Now the Deputy Delaunay, a very personable, insinuating man of forty, was shrewd enough to perceive the opportunities which his position afforded him, and if he might have had scruples about making use of them, these were entirely stifled by his need of the Descoings. But to make money in the operations of which he perceived the chance, it is necessary to have money, and Delaunay disposed of none. So he had sought his Angévin compatriot Benoît for the necessary financial assistance.

Benoît was not attracted by the partnership. He perceived, however, that it might meet certain requirements of de Batz, which the Baron had cautiously mentioned to him.

"I know a man," he said, "who commands ample funds, and who is always on the alert for precisely such affairs as you have in mind. I think you and he might very well accommodate yourselves. Come and dine with me one day next week, and make his acquaintance."

Delaunay had readily accepted the invitation, and de Batz found the Representative awaiting him when, with André-Louis, he was ushered into the banker's well-appointed parlour.

A man of great vigour and energy, this Delaunay, as was to be seen at a glance. A little above middle height, he was massively built, with an enormous breadth of shoulders. His features were neat, and his mouth so small that it lent an almost infantile character to his smooth, round, healthily-coloured face, and this despite the grey of his thick clustering hair which was innocent of powder. But there was nothing infantile in the keenness of the intensely blue eyes under their black eyebrows or in the massive, intelligent forehead.

The banker, tall, florid, inclining to middle-aged portliness, and dressed with care from his powdered head to his buckled shoes, breezily conducted them to table.

There was no evidence here of the scarcity of food that was beginning to trouble Paris. A dish of trout stewed in red wine was followed by a succulent goose à l'Angévine with truffles from Périgord, to the accompaniment of a well-sunned and well-

matured wine of Bordeaux, which Delaunay praised in terms allusive to the events of the day.

"One might almost forgive the men of the Gironde for the sake of the grapes they grow." He held his glass to the light as he spoke, and the glance of those intensely blue eyes grew tender as it surveyed the murrey-tinted wine. He sighed. "Poor devils!" he said, and drank.

The Baron raised his brows in wonder, for Delaunay was staunchly of the Mountain party. "You pity them?"

"We can afford to pity those who are no longer able to harm or hinder us." The Representative's voice was softly modulated; but, like the rest of him, suggested great reserves of power. "Compassion is at times a luxury; especially when accompanied by relief. Now that the Girondins are broken, I can say: 'Poor devils!' with a clear conviction that it is much better that we should say it of them than that they should say it of us."

Not until dinner was done, and an Armagnac had come to succeed the Bordeaux, did the banker break the ice of the business for them, making himself the advocate of his compatriot.

"I have told the Citizen-Representative, my dear de Batz, that you are a considerable man of affairs, and that you are particularly interested in the purchase of large lots of confiscated émigré property so as to break it up and sell it again piecemeal. I do not need to tell you that the Citizen Delaunay could be of great assistance to you by virtue of the information he receives in his capacity as a Representative."

"Ah, no! Ah, no! That I must correct!" The Deputy was all virtuous eagerness. "A misconception were so easily formed. I do not say . . . I do not think that it would amount to an abuse of trust if I took advantage of knowledge gained as a result of my position in the government. After all, it is a recognized practice not only in France but elsewhere. This, however, is not the knowledge that I offer. It is a malicious world, and a man's actions, especially the actions of a man of State, are so easily misunderstood or misinterpreted. The knowledge that I offer, then, is the quite exceptional knowledge of land values. I am country-bred, and all my life the land has been my particular study. It is this knowledge that I offer, you understand, citizen."

"Oh, but perfectly," said de Batz. "Perfectly. Do not give yourself the trouble of explaining further. As for your knowledge of land values, it is no doubt exceptional; but then, so is mine; otherwise I should never have embarked upon these transactions. I must regret, of course, that where the association might be of

value to me, it is withheld by certain scruples which I must not presume to criticize."

"Do you mean that you consider them without foundation in reality?" said Delaunay, as if asking to be persuaded of the fact.

De Batz excluded all persuasiveness from his reply. "I do not perceive who would suffer by the use of the information which it would be in your power to supply. And it is my view that where no suffering is inflicted, no scruples can be tenable. But a man's conscience is a delicate, sensitive thing. I am far from wishing to offer arguments against sentiments which are conscientious."

Delaunay fell gloomily thoughtful. "Do you know," he said, "that you have presented a point of view that had never occurred to me?"

"That I can perfectly understand," said the Baron, in the tone of one who finds a subject tedious and desires to drop it. And dropped it might have been if André-Louis had not thought that it was time for him to take a hand.

"It may help you, Citizen-Representative, if you reflect that these transactions are actually of advantage to the State, which thus finds a ready purchaser for the properties it seeks to liquidate."

"Ah, yes!" Delaunay was as eager now as he had appeared reluctant before. "That is true. Very true. It is an aspect I had not regarded."

Across the table Benoît winked slyly at de Batz.

"Let me turn it over in my mind, Citizen de Batz, and then perhaps we might discuss the matter anew."

The Baron remained cold. "If it should be your pleasure," he said, in a tone of maddening indifference.

Walking home, in the cool of the evening, to the Rue de Ménars, André-Louis was in excellent spirits.

"That fish will bite," he said. "You may land him when you will, Jean."

"I perceived it. But, after all, he's small fry, André. I aim at bigger things."

"The big things are to be reached by stages. Not all at once, Jean. Impatience never helps. A small fish, this Delaunay. Agreed. But he may serve us as a bait for bigger ones. Do not despise him. To change the metaphor, use him as the first rung of the ladder by which we are to scale the Mountain. Or to change it yet again, let him be the first of the sheep to show the way through the gap."

"To the devil with your metaphors!"

"Bear them in mind, none the less."

They reached number seven in the Rue de Ménars. De Batz opened the wicket in the porte-cochère, and they entered the courtyard of the unpretentious house. Within, sitting on the steps, they found a burly, shabby fellow in a cocked hat too big for him, set off by an imposing tricolour cockade. He rose at sight of them, knocking the ashes from the short clay pipe he had been smoking.

"The Citizen Jean de Batz, heretofore Baron de Batz?" he challenged truculently.

"I am Jean de Batz. Who are you?"

"Burlandeux is my name. Officer of the municipal police." His tone lent a sinister quality to the announcement.

The Baron was not impressed. "Your business, Citizen-Municipal?"

The fellow's unclean face was grim. "I have some questions to put to you. We should be better above. But as you please."

"Above, by all means." The Baron spoke indifferently. "I trust you are not to waste my time, citizen."

"As to that, we shall see presently."

They went up to the first floor, André-Louis through his uneasiness admiring the Baron's perfect deportment. De Batz knocked, and the door was instantly opened by Biret-Tissot, his servant, a wisp of a man with a lean olive face, keen dark eyes, and the wide mouth of a comedian.

De Batz led the way into a small salon, Burlandeux following, and André-Louis bringing up the rear. The municipal would have checked him, but de Batz intervened. "This is my friend, the Citizen Moreau. You may speak freely before him. God be praised I have no secrets. Close the door, André. Now, Citizen-Municipal, I am at your service."

Burlandeux advanced deliberately into the elegant little salon with its gilded furniture, soft carpet and Sèvres pieces set before the oval mirror on the overmantel. He took his stand with his back to the long narrow window.

"Moreau, eh? Why, yes. He was named to me as your associate."

"Correctly named," said de Batz. "And then?"

Before that peremptoriness Burlandeux came straight to business. "You've been denounced to me, Citizen ci-devant, for anti-civism. I learn that you hold meetings here of persons who are none too well regarded by the Nation."

"With what purpose is it alleged that I hold these meetings?"

"That is what I have come to ask you. When you've

answered me I shall know whether to lay the information before the Committee of Public Safety. Let me see your card, citizen."

De Batz at once produced the identity-card issued by the section in which he resided, a card which under a recent enactment every citizen was compelled to procure.

"Yours, citizen?" the municipal demanded of André-Louis with autocratic curtness.

Both cards were perfectly in order, having been issued to their owners by Pottier de Lille, the secretary of the section, who was in the Baron's pay. Burlandeux returned them without comment. Their correctness, however, did not dismay him.

"Well, citizens, what have you to say? You'll not pretend to be patriots in these dainty pimpish lodgings."

André-Louis laughed in his face. "You are under the common delusion, my friend, that dirt is a proof of patriotism. If that were so, you would be a great patriot."

Burlandeux became obscene. "You take this tone with me, do you? Ah, that! But we shall have to look into your affairs. You have been denounced to me as agents of a foreign power."

It was de Batz who answered, coolly. "Ah! Members of the Austrian Committee, no doubt." This was an allusion to a mare's nest which some months earlier had brought into ridicule the Representative Chabot, who claimed to have discovered it.

"By God, if you are amusing yourself at my expense, you'd better remember he laughs best who laughs last. Come now, my fine fellows. Am I to denounce you, or will you show me reason why I shouldn't?"

"What reason would satisfy you?" wondered de Batz.

"These meetings that are held here? If they are not for treasonable purposes, what are they?"

"Am I the only man in Paris to receive visitors?"

"Visitors! Oh, visitors! But these are not ordinary visitors. They come too often, and always at the same time, and they are always the same. That's my information. No use to deny it. No use to tell me any of your lies."

The Baron's manner changed. "Will you leave by the door, or shall we throw you from the window?"

The cool incisive tone acted like a douche upon the burly municipal. He fell back a pace and drew himself up.

"Ah, name of a name! My damned little aristocrat . . ."

The Baron threw wide the door of the salon to interrupt him. "Outside, you filth! Back to your dunghill! At the double! March!"

"Holy Guillotine! We shall see if you talk like that when you come before the Committee." The purple municipal moved to the door, deliberately so as to save his dignity. "You shall be taught a lesson, you cursed traitors with your aristocratic airs and graces. My name is Burlandeux. You'll remember that."

He was gone. They heard the outer door slam after him. André-Louis smiled deprecation.

"That is not quite how I should have handled him."

"It is not at all how he should have been handled. He should have been thrown from the window without warning. An indelicate fellow! Let him go before the Committee. Sénard will do his business."

"I would have given Sénard definite grounds upon which to deal with him if you had been less precipitate. However, that will be for another time. For he will certainly return to the assault. You should curb your humours, Jean."

"Curb my humours before an obscenity like that!" The Baron snorted. "Well, well! Where is Langéac?"

He summoned Tissot. Monsieur de Langéac had not yet arrived. The Baron glanced at the Sèvres timepiece, and muttered an oath of exasperation.

"What's to astonish you?" wondered André-Louis. "The young gentleman is never punctual. A very unsatisfactory fellow, Jean, this Langéac. If he's typical of the tools d'Enragues employs it is not surprising that the Regent's credit prospers so little in the courts of Europe. Myself, I should be sorry to have him for my valet."

To aggravate his offence, when Langéac arrived at last, out of breath, he came startlingly brave in a coat of black stripes on a yellow ground, and a cravat that André-Louis likened unkindly to an avalanche.

"You want to take the eye, it seems. You'll be taking that of the National Widow. She has a taste in over-coquettish young gentlemen."

Langéac was annoyed. He had long since conceived a dislike for André-Louis, whose sneers he had earned every time he deserved them, which was often. "You don't dress like a sans-culotte, yourself."

"Nor yet like a zebra. It's well enough in a virgin forest, but a little conspicuous in Paris for a gentleman whose pursuits should make him study self-effacement. Have you heard of a revolution in France? No wonder municipal officers grow suspicious of the ci-devant Baron de Batz on the score of his visitors."

Langeac replied with vague invective, and so came under the condemnation of de Batz.

"Moreau is right. That coat is an advertisement of anti-civism. A conspirator should be circumspect, in all things."

"For a gentleman," said the fatuous Langéac, "there are limits to circumspection."

"But none for a fool," said André-Louis.

"I resent that, Moreau! You are insufferable. Insufferable, do you understand?"

"If you will make transcendently foolish statements, by way of justifying transcendently foolish actions, can you expect congratulations? But I am sorry you find me insufferable."

"And, anyway," said de Batz, "shall we come to business? I am supposing that you will have something to report. Have you seen Cortey?"

The question recalled Langéac from his annoyance. "I have just left him. The affair is for Friday night."

De Batz and André-Louis stiffened into attention. Langéac supplied details.

"Cortey will be on guard at the Temple from midnight with twenty men, every one of whom he swears he can trust, and Michonis will be on duty in the Queen's prison and ready for us. Cortey has seen him. Michonis answers for it that the other municipals will be out of the way. Cortey would like a final word with you on the arrangements as soon as may be."

"Naturally," said de Batz. "I'll see him to-morrow. We've two days, and at need we could be ready in two hours."

"Is there anything for me to do?" asked Langéac, his manner still a little sulky.

"Nothing now. You will be of Moreau's party, to cover the retreat. You will assemble in the Rue Charlot at eleven o'clock. See that you are punctual. We shall convey the royal ladies and the Dauphin to Roussel's in the Rue Helvétius for the night, and we shall hope to get them out of Paris a day or two later. But I will attend to all that. For you nothing more now, Langéac, until eleven o'clock on Friday night."

CHAPTER XVI

IN THE RUE CHARLOT

CORTEY, known when in uniform as Captain Cortey, the commandant of the National Guard of the Section Lepelletier, kept when out of uniform a grocer's shop at the corner of the Rue de la Loi. An orderly citizen and at heart a monarchist, he had enlisted in the guard of the section when it was still entirely monarchical. He remained in it out of prudence now that its character had become entirely republican.

Because in its ranks there were still a good many who shared his sentiments it had been possible for Cortey to get together a little band of men for the attempt that was now fixed for Friday night. It was one of those periodic occasions on which it fell to the duty of the Section Lepelletier to supply the guard for the Temple, where the royal prisoners were confined.

As captain of the guard, it lay to a limited extent within Cortey's power to select the men for duty under him, and one of the twenty now selected was in the conspiracy for the rescue of the Queen. They were to co-operate with de Batz and with Sergeant Michonis, the municipal in charge of the guard within the prison.

The plan, every detail of which had been carefully worked out, was an extremely simple one. The municipals within the Temple were not in the habit of wearying themselves unduly with a vigilance which the locks and bolts and the National Guard on patrol duty outside rendered superfluously formal. So long as one of their number complied with the order of the Committee of General Safety by stationing himself within the chamber occupied by the royal prisoners, the others were in the habit of retiring to the Council Chamber, and there, within hail in case of need, they commonly spent the night playing cards.

For Friday night next, Michonis would, himself, assume the duty of guarding the prisoners, and he had undertaken to answer for it that his eight fellow-municipals should be out of the way. To the three royal ladies he would convey three uniforms of the National Guard which they were to assume by midnight. At that hour a party of a dozen men, also in uniforms of the National Guard, would knock for admission at the Temple Gate. The porter, supposing them to be a patrol on a round of inspection within the prison, would offer no obstacle to their entrance. They would ascend the tower to the Queen's chamber, gag and bind Michonis,

so that afterwards he should present the appearance of having been overpowered. They would then place the three disguised royal ladies and the little Dauphin in their midst, descend the staircase, and issue with them from the prison. It was not likely that the sleepy porter would notice the increase in the number of persons composing the patrol. If he did, it would be the worse for him, as for any other who should happen to surprise them before they were clear of the prison. In this respect the orders of de Batz were precise and ruthless. Anyone challenging them was to be dispatched with cold steel as silently as possible.

Once outside, the patrol would turn the corner into the Rue Charlot. Here André-Louis' little band would be waiting to escort the royal ladies to a courtyard where Balthazar Roussel had a coach in readiness in which to convey them across Paris to his house in the Rue Helvétius. There they must lie hidden until the hue-and-cry had died down and an opportunity presented itself to carry them off to Roussel's country house at Brie-Comte-Robert.

The part of Cortey and his men would consist in keeping out of the way of the false patrol which would substitute them. They might subsequently be censured for incompetent vigilance ; but hardly for more.

As a result of Langéac's communication, de Batz and André-Louis paid a visit to Cortey's shop on the following evening, for any final understanding that might be necessary with the grocer-captain. Sergeant Michonis was with him at the time. Whilst they were in talk in the otherwise untenanted shop, André-Louis, chancing to turn, beheld a bulky figure surmounted by an enormous cocked hat silhouetted in the dim light against the shop window, as if inspecting the wares exhibited there.

He detached himself from the others and sauntered to the door, reaching it just in time to see the figure beating a retreat down the Rue des Filles St. Thomas.

De Batz presently joined him, emerging, and André-Louis gave him the news.

"We are under the observation of our friend Burlandeux. He must have trailed us from the Rue de Ménars."

De Batz made light of it. "He has seen me buying groceries then."

"He may link Cortey with us afterwards, and perhaps Michonis."

"In that case I shall have to devote a little attention to him. At present his affair must wait. There are more pressing matters."

These matters were all carefully disposed of in the course of the next twenty-four hours, and on Friday night André-Louis found himself pacing the length of the Rue Charlot in the neighbourhood of the Temple with Langéac and the Marquis de la Guiche—the same who had been associated with de Batz in the attempt to rescue the King. In their pacings they passed ever and anon the cavernous porte-cochère of No. 12, behind whose closed gates the carriage waited with harnessed horses in the charge of young Balthazar Roussel.

The moon riding near the full in the serene June sky, the street lamps had not been lighted. André-Louis and his companions had chosen the side of the street where the shadows lay blackest. They were not the only ones abroad in that quiet place at this midnight hour. Another three—Devaux, Marbot and the Chevalier de Larnache—made a similar pacing group that crossed and recrossed the steps of the other three. Once when a patrol had come marching down the street, these six had disappeared with almost magic suddenness into the black shadows of doorways, to re-emerge when the retreating footsteps of the soldiers had faded in the distance.

Midnight struck, and the six of them came together at the corner of the Rue du Temple, ready for the action which they now supposed imminent.

Action was imminent, indeed; but not of the kind they expected.

Burlandeux had been busy. He had carried a denunciation before the Revolutionary Committee of his own section, which happened to be that of the Temple. The terms of it are best given in those employed by one of its members, a cobbler named Simon who, officious, fanatical and greedy of fame, had gone off with it to the Committee of Public Safety at the Tuileries.

He came, he announced, to inform them that the heretofore Baron de Batz had been denounced to his section as a counter-revolutionary conspirator. It had been observed that he associated too frequently for innocence with a grocer named Cortey who was in command of the National Guard of the Section Lepelletier. It had also been observed that another assiduous visitor of this Cortey was the municipal Michonis, who was employed at the Temple, and only last night Cortey, Michonis, de Batz and a man named Moreau held what appeared to the observer to be a consultation in the grocer's shop.

"That is all that our informer can tell us," the Citizen Simon concluded. "But I am not a fool, citizens. I have my wits,

God be thanked, and they show me at once a suspicious and dangerous combination in all this."

The half-dozen members of the Committee of Public Safety, assembled in haste to hear the denunciation which the cobbler had described as urgent, were not disposed to take him seriously. In the absence of the president of the committee, the chair had been taken by a Representative named Lavicomterie. Now it happened that this Lavicomterie was one of de Batz's associates, whilst Sénard, the secretary and factotum of the committee, who was also present and whose voice carried a deal of weight with its members, was in the Baron's pay. The mention of the Baron's name had rendered both these patriots extremely attentive.

When the squat, unclean, repellent Simon had brought his denunciation to a close, Lavicomterie led the opinion of his fellow committee-men by a laugh.

"On my soul citizen, if this is all the matter, you had best begin by proving that these men were not buying groceries."

Simon scowled. His little eyes beady as a rat's in his yellow face, were malevolent.

"This is not a matter to be treated lightly. I will ask you all, citizens, to bear in mind that this grocer takes turn at patrolling the Temple. Michonis is regularly on guard there. Do you see nothing in the association?"

"It makes it natural" ventured Sénard.

"Ah! And de Batz, then? This foreign agent? What are they doing shut up in the shop with him and this other fellow who is his constant companion?"

"How do you know that de Batz is a foreign agent?" asked a member of the committee

"That is in the information I have received."

Lavicomterie followed up his associate's question "Where is the evidence of so very grave a charge?"

"Can anyone suppose that a ci-devant aristocrat, a ci-devant Baron would be in Paris on any other business?"

"There are a good many ci-devants in Paris, Citizen Simon," said Sénard "Do you charge them all with being foreign agents? If not, why do you single out the Citizen de Batz?"

Simon almost foamed at the mouth. "Because he consorts with the sergeant who is in charge of the guard at the Temple and with the captain of the National Guard that is to do patrol duty there to-night. Sacred name of a name! Do you still see nothing in it?"

Lavicomterie would perhaps have brushed the matter finally

aside and dismissed the fellow. But a member of the committee, taking the view that Michonis should instantly be sent for and examined, and others supporting him in this, Lavicomterie dared offer no opposition.

As a sequel soon after eleven o'clock that night, the Citizen Simon, swollen in importance and accompanied by a body of half a dozen lads of his section—for he was prepared at need to exceed his orders and proceed upon his own initiative—presented himself at the gate of the Temple. Having displayed the warrant granted him by the Committee of Public Safety, he made his way at once to the Queen's chamber in the tower, to assure himself that all was well.

Silently he surveyed the three pale-faced ladies in black who occupied that cheerless room and the boy who was now King of France, asleep on a wretched truckle-bed, turned his attention to Michonis. He presented him with an order to surrender his charge temporarily to the bearer, and himself attend at once before the Committee of Public Safety, which was sitting to receive him.

Michonis, a tall, loose-limbed fellow, could not exclude from his frank, good-humoured countenance a dismay that amounted almost to anguish. At once he concluded that there had been betrayal. But the danger of losing his own head over the business troubled him less than the thought of the bitter sorrow that was coming to these sorely-tried royal ladies whose hopes of deliverance now ran so high. This seemed to him one of Fate's refinements of cruelty. He was anxious, too, on the score of de Batz, who might now walk into a trap from which there would be no escape. He was wondering how he might warn the Baron when Simon, whose close-set eyes had been watching his face, put an end to that conjecture by informing Michonis that he would send him before the Committee of Public Safety under guard.

"It is an arrest, then!" cried the dismayed municipal. "Your order says nothing of that."

"Not an arrest?" He was answered with a close-lipped smile. "Just a precaution."

Michonis displayed anger. "Your warrant for this?"

"My common sense. You may leave me to account for my actions."

And so Michonis, in fear and suppressed fury, departed from the Temple under the escort of two municipals, leaving Simon in charge there in his place.

The other municipals, who had looked forward to a night of

ease over their cards, to which Michonis had educated them by now, were ordered by Simon to those various posts of duty on the staircase and elsewhere, which it had long since been regarded as superfluous to guard.

When the false patrol arrived at a few minutes before midnight, the diligent Simon was in the courtyard.

A lieutenant marched in his men—a dozen of them—and in their wake, before the gates could be closed, came a civilian, plainly dressed and brisk of step, whose face was lost in the shadow of a wide-brimmed hat.

Challenged by the guard, this civilian presented a sheet of paper. The sentry was unable to read; but the official aspect of the paper was unmistakable, and the round seal of the Convention at the head of it was an ideograph with which he was familiar.

Simon strolled forward. His own bodyguard of patriots was at hand there for any emergency such as the suspected treason of Cortey might provide.

"Who's this?" he asked.

A trim, stiffly-built figure stood unmoved before him, making no attempt to answer. The sentry handed the paper to Simon, and held up his lantern, so that the light fell on the sheet.

It was an order from the Committee of Public Safety to the Citizen Dumont, whom it described as a medical practitioner, to visit the Dauphin in his prison at the Temple and report at once upon his health.

Simon read the paper a second time, scanning it closely. Undoubtedly it was in order; seal and signature were all as they should be. But Simon was by no means satisfied. With an exaggerated sense of the authority in which he had so lately been vested, he accounted it odd that he should not have been informed by the committee of the existence of this order.

"This is a strange hour for such a visit," he growled, mistrustfully, as he handed back the paper.

The civilian's answer was prompt. "It should have been paid some hours ago. But I have other patients as important as this Capet brat. My report must be made by morning."

"It is odd! Cursedly odd!" Muttering, Simon took the lantern from the hands of the sentry and held it up so that the light dissipated the shadows under that round black hat. He recoiled at sight of the man of medicine's face.

"De Batz!" he ejaculated. Then with an unclean oath, almost in a breath he added: "Arrest that man!"

Even as he spoke he sprang forward, himself to seize the

pseudo-doctor. He was met by a kick in the stomach that sent him sprawling. The lantern was shattered on the cobbles, and before the winded Simon could pick himself up the Baron had vanished. The men of the patrol who helped him to rise detained him with a solicitude for his injuries, for which he cursed them furiously whilst struggling to deliver himself from their arms. At last he broke away. "After him!" he screamed. "Follow me!" And he dashed through the gateway, his own myrmidons at his heels.

The false lieutenant, a big fellow named Boissancourt, judged that he had ensured for de Batz a sufficient start to enable him to reach the neighbouring shelter of No. 12 in the Rue Charlot. As the alarm now brought the whole guard of municipals streaming into the courtyard, Boissancourt coolly marched out his patrol, and left the porter to explain. To have followed Simon would have led to meeting him on his return. Explanations must have ensued, with incalculable consequences to themselves and also perhaps to Cortey. Boissancourt judged it best in all the circumstances to march his patrol away in the opposite direction and then disperse it. For to-night the blow had failed.

So far as de Batz was concerned, Bois ancourt's assumptions were exact. The Baron made for the Rue Charlot. He obeyed instinct rather than reasoned thought. He was as yet too confused to think. All that he realized was that either by accident or betrayal the carefully-prepared plot was ruined, and he himself in the tightest corner he had yet known, not even excepting his adventure on the morning of the King's execution. If he were caught to-night, whilst still, as it were, red-handed, it would certainly be the end of him. Not all the influence he could command would suffice to save him from the tale of his attempt to gain access to the royal prisoners.

He must trust, therefore, to speed; and so he ran as he had never run before; and already the feet of his pursuers came clattering after him.

To the six who waited at the corner of the Rue Charlot this patter of running feet was the first intimation at once that the moment for action had arrived and that this action was other than that for which they were prepared. Their uneasiness swiftly mounted to alarm at the sounds which followed: a shout, an explosion of vociferations, and the rapidly approaching clatter that told of flight and pursuit. No sooner had André-Louis realized it than the pursued was amongst them revealing himself for de Batz in a half-dozen imprecatory words which announced the failure and bade them save themselves.

He scarcely paused to utter them before plunging on down the Rue Charlot.

Instinctively the others would have followed him in his flight, had not André-Louis arrested them.

"Turn about, and hold them," he commanded crisply. "We must cover his retreat."

It needed no more to remind them that this was, indeed, their duty. At whatever cost to themselves the Baron's valuable life must be preserved.

A moment later the pursuers were upon them, a half-dozen lads led by the bow-legged Simon. It was a relief to discover that they had to deal with civilians, for André-Louis had entertained an unpleasant fear that bayonets were about to make short work of them.

Simon hailed them with confidence and authority. "To us, citizens! After that fellow who passed you. He's a traitor scoundrel."

He and his followers pressed forward looking for nothing here but compliance and reinforcement. To their surprise they found themselves flung back by the six who held the street. The Citizen Simon raged furiously.

"In the name of the law! Out of the way! We are agents of the Committee of Public Safety."

André-Louis derided them. "Agents of the Committee of Public Safety! Any gang of footpads can call itself that." He stood forward, his manner peremptory, addressing Simon. "Your card, citizen? It happens that I am an agent of the committee, myself."

As a ruse to gain time, nothing could have been better. Some precious moments were wasted in sheer surprise. Then Simon grew frenzied by the need for haste if the fugitive Baron was not to escape him.

"I summon you to help me overtake that runagate scoundrel. We'll make each other's better acquaintance afterwards. Come on!"

Again he attempted to advance, and again he was flung rudely back.

"Not so fast. I'll make your acquaintance now, if you please. Where is this card of yours, citizen? Out with it, or we'll march you to the post of the Section."

Simon swore foully, and suspicions awoke in him. "By God! I believe you all belong to this same gang of damned traitors. Where's your own card?"

André-Louis' hand went to the pocket of his riding-coat.

"It's here." He fumbled for a moment, adding this to the wasted time. When at last he brought forth his hand again, it grasped a pistol by the barrel. The butt of it crashed upon the Citizen Simon's brow, and sent him reeling back to tumble in a heap.

"Sweep them out of the way!" cried André-Louis, plunging forward.

In an instant battle was joined and eleven men were a writhing, thrusting, stabbing human clot. Hoarse voices blended discordantly; a pistol shot went off. The street was awakening. Windows were being thrown up and even doors were opening.

André-Louis, desperately beating off an attack that seemed concentrated upon himself, suddenly caught the glow of lanterns and the livid gleam of bayonets rounding the corner of the Rue de Bretagne. A patrol was advancing at the double. At first he thought it might be Cortey and his men, or Boissancourt, either of which would perhaps have meant salvation. But realizing at once from the direction of their approach that there was no ground for the hope, he gave the word to scatter

"Away! Away! Every man for himself!"

He turned to set the example of flight, when one of Simon's men leapt upon him, and bore him down. He twisted even as he fell, drew his second pistol with his left hand, and fired. It missed his assailant, but brought down another of the patriots with a bullet in his leg. Only two of them remained entirely whole, and these two were both now upon André-Louis. They were joined by Simon, who, having recovered from the blow that had felled him, came staggering towards them. Of the other three, one sat against a wall nursing a broken head from which the blood was streaming, a second lay face downward in the middle of the street, whilst the third, crippled by the bullet in his leg, was howling dismally.

Of the royalists, the Chevalier de Larnache was dead, with a knife in his heart, and André-Louis lay inert, stretched out by a blow over the head from one of his captors. The other four royalists had vanished when the patrol reached the field of battle.

Their escape was assisted by the fact that, entirely misunderstanding the situation, the sergeant of the patrol ordered his men to surround these disturbers of the peace, and the Citizen Simon standing now before him, was still too dazed by the effects of the blow to think of more than one thing at a time. At the moment he was being required by the sergeant to give an account of himself. He produced his civic card. The sergeant scanned it.

"What were you doing here, Citizen Simon?"

"What was I doing here? Ah, that! Sacred name of a pig, what was I doing?" He almost choked in his fury. "I was defeating a royalist plot to save the Widow Capet and her cub. But for me her aristocratic friends would have got her away by now. And you ask me what I am doing! As it is, the damned scoundrels have got off; all but this one, who's dead, and this one we hold."

The sergeant was incredulous. "Oh, but a plot to save the heretofore Queen! How could that have succeeded?"

"How?" Fiercer grew the Citizen Simon before this incredulity. "Take me to the headquarters of the section. I'll explain myself there, by God! And let your men bring along this cursed aristocrat. On your lives, don't let him get away. I mean to make sure of this one. It'll be one of the cursed fribbles for the guillotine, anyway."

CHAPTER XVII

AT CHARONNE

IN the outskirts of the hamlet of Charonne, between four and five miles from Paris, on the very edge of the Park of Bagnolet, the Baron de Batz possessed a pleasant little property, which had once, in the days of the Regency, been a hunting pavilion. It was tenanted in 1793 by the talented Babette de Grandmaison, who until lately had been a singer at the Italian Theatre. The property was nominally owned by her brother Burette, who was the postmaster of Beauvais. Burette was no more than a mask for the Baron de Batz. Foreseeing that the property of the nobles, whether they emigrated or remained in France, was doomed to confiscation, and acting with that foresight which usually enabled him to carry out his undertakings with safety if not always with success, the Baron had made a simulated sale of this property to Burette, who was not likely to be molested in his possessions.

In this country retreat on the day after the miscarried

attempt to save the Queen, the survivors of the rough-and-tumble in the Rue Charlot were assembled with de Batz.

The Baron had succeeded last night in finding shelter at No. 12, where, some hours later, when the alarm had died down, the others had come one by one to join him. They had remained there until morning. Then, because he had deemed it prudent to disappear from Paris for some days, he had made his way to Charonne, quitting Paris by the Enfer Barrier rather than by that of the Bastille which led directly to the Charonne road. Thither he had bidden his companions to follow him severally, and thither they had safely come.

Langéac had arrived late in the afternoon, some hours after the others, for Langéac accounted it his duty to inform the Chevalier de Pomelles, who was d'Entragues' chief agent in Paris—the head of the royalist committee which d'Entragues had established there—of last night's events.

Langéac found de Batz at table with Devaux, Boissancourt, La Guiche and Roussel. Babette de Grandmaison was also present, a dark, handsome young woman who belonged body and soul to the Baron and who shared now the dejection which, whilst general, sat most heavily upon de Batz. As much as by the exasperating failure of his cherished plot and by the apparently fortuitous wrecking of plans so carefully prepared was de Batz now troubled by the fate of André-Louis, whom he had come to love and to whose gallant stand he owed his own escape.

Langéac's arrival aroused the hope of news. De Batz started up eagerly as the young man entered. Langéac met his anxious questions with a shrug.

"I have no definite news. But there is no ground for any hope."

De Batz displayed a fierce impatience. He was white, his eyes blood-injected.

"Is he alive, at least?"

Langéac was entirely pessimistic, and rather languid. "Does it matter? For his own sake I hope that he is not. It will be the guillotine for him if he has survived. That is inevitable."

De Batz was beyond being civil. "Devil take your assumptions! I do not ask for them. I ask for facts. If you have been unable to glean any, say so, and I'll employ someone else to obtain them, or else go myself."

Langéac's lips tightened sulkily. "I have already told you that I bring no news."

"I should have known you wouldn't. You're so damned

careful of your skin, Langéac. Will you tell me what you've been doing all these hours in Paris?"

Langéac faced him across the table. "I've not been taking care of my skin, sir! And I resent your words. You have no right to use them to me."

"I care nothing about your resentments." The Baron rapped his knuckles on the table. "I ask you what you have been doing in Paris. All that it imported me to know is whether Moreau is alive."

The gigantic and rather phlegmatic Boissancourt, beside whose chair Langéac was standing, leaned across to set a hand on the Baron's arm. "Patience, de Batz, my friend," he boomed in his great voice. "You have already been answered. After all, Langéac can't work miracles."

The hawk-faced, impetuous young Marquis de La Guiche agreed with bitterly ironical vehemence. "That's the truth, by God!"

Devaux sought to keep the peace. "The fact is, Langéac, we are all a little fretted."

De Batz shrugged impatiently, and set himself to pace the room in line with the three long windows that stood open to the lawn. Babette's handsome eyes followed him, pain and anxiety in their dark depths. Then she looked up at the resentful newcomer with a sad little smile.

"You are standing, Monsieur de Langéac. Sit down and give yourself something to eat. You will be tired and hungry."

"Tired, yes. God knows I'm tired. But too sick at heart for hunger. I thank you, mademoiselle." He flung himself into a chair, stretching his dusty legs under the table. He too was pale, his red-brown hair dishevelled. "Give me some wine, Devaux."

Devaux passed him the bottle, whilst de Batz continued to pace, like a caged animal. At last he halted.

"I must know," he announced. "I can't bear any more of this uncertainty."

"Unfortunately," said Devaux, "Langéac is right. There is no uncertainty. Oh, spare me your scowls, de Batz. God knows I am as sick at heart as you are. But facts must be faced, and we must count our losses without self-deception. Larnache was killed, and if Moreau wasn't, he soon will be. He is irrevocably lost."

De Batz swore viciously. "If he's not dead," he added, "I'll get him out of their hands somehow."

"If you try," said Devaux, "you will merely thrust your own

head through the window of the guillotine, and you owe it to us all and to the cause not to do that. Come to your senses, man. This is not a matter in which you can interfere. Not all the influence you can command—not if you had twenty times the influence you have—could you do anything. If you attempt it you'll doom yourself by betraying your share in last night's events, which rests at present on the word of only one man who could easily be shown to have been mistaken in the dark. Resign yourself, my friend. There are no battles without casualties."

De Batz sat down and took his head in his hands. There was a lugubrious silence. Devaux, himself a member of a government department, spoke with authority. Moreover, he was known for a man of calm, clear judgment. Boissancourt and Roussel confirmed his words. The Marquis de la Guiche, however, was more of the temper of de Batz.

"If we knew at least how this thing happened!" he exclaimed. "Was it just blundering Fate that intervened, or was there betrayal?" He turned to Langéac. "You did not think of seeking news of Michonis at his house?"

"You may call me a coward for that," the young man answered. "But, frankly, I dared not. If there was betrayal, the house of Michonis would be a trap for any of us."

The Baron's face remained sternly inscrutable.

"You have not yet told us what actually you did in Paris."

"I went to the Rue de Ménars, and I saw Tissot. There had been no domiciliary visit there, which at least is hopeful; for in the event of betrayal that is where investigations must have begun."

The Baron nodded. "Yes. Well? After that?"

"After that I sought Pomelles."

La Guiche flung him a fresh sneer.

"Oh, of course you must report our failure to d'Entragues' committee."

"You will remember, Monsieur le Marquis, that, after all, I am d'Entragues' man."

"I should like you better if I could forget it. Langéac," said de Batz. "What had Pomelles to say?"

"I am required to start for Hamm at once, to report the event."

At this the Baron's barely-suppressed fury burst forth again.

"Ah, that, for instance! To be sure he'll be in haste to have my failure reported, and your friend d'Entragues will rub his hands over it. When do you start?"

"To-night, if you offer no objection."

"I? Offer objection? To your departure? My good

Langéac, I have never yet discovered a use for you. I thought I had last night. But you have shown me how ridiculous was the assumption. Oh, you may go to Hamm or to Hell when you please."

Langéac got up. "De Batz, you are intolerable!"

"Report it with the rest."

Langéac was shaking with indignation. "You make me glad that our association is at an end."

"Then we are both pleased, Langéac. A safe journey to you."

CHAPTER XVIII

LANGÉAC'S REPORT

It may be that as a consequence of the terms on which they parted Langéac permitted no hopefulness to mitigate the pessimism of the report he presented to d'Entragues at Hamm a week later.

And d'Entragues actually did rub his hands as de Batz had foretold.

"That boastful Gascon's failure was foregone," he commented with his crooked smile. "Nothing else ever attends his rhodomontades. This would be a dark moment if our hopes had rested upon his success. Fortunately her majesty's deliverance is as good as assured by my own measures at Vienna. The Maréchal de Coburg has received instructions to propose an exchange of prisoners. The members of the Convention whom Dumouriez delivered to Austria against the imprisoned members of the royal family. I hear from Monsieur de Trauttmansdorff that the proposal has been well received, and there is now little doubt that the exchange will be effected. So that the failure of Monsieur de Batz finds me without tears." He paused. "What gentleman did you say his rashness has lost to us?"

"The Chevalier de Larnache and André-Louis Moreau."

"Moreau?" D'Entragues searched his memory a moment. "Oh, yes! That other Rhodomont whom de Batz enlisted here. Why . . ." He checked on a sudden thought. The expression of his dark, lean face was very odd, thought Monsieur de Langéac

as he watched it. Abruptly the Count asked him: "Was Monsieur Moreau killed, do you say?"

"If he was not killed on the spot, which he may well have been, he will certainly be dead by now. The Revolutionary Tribunal would not be likely to spare a man arraigned on his indictment."

D'Entragues was plunged in thought. At last, "Well, well!" he said. "You had better come with your tale to Monsieur. I think it will interest him."

Within an hour or two of hearing Monsieur de Langéac's report, the Comte de Provence paid a visit to the Lord of Gavrillac at his lodging at the Bear Inn.

In a prince so rigid in the observance of forms, this was an overwhelming condescension. But it was no longer a novelty where Monsieur de Kercadiou and his niece were concerned. It was become a habit on the part of his highness to drop in upon them in informal, unceremonious fashion, and to sit in that room of theirs, his mantle of rank if not entirely discarded at least so far loosened on these occasions that he would discuss with them almost on terms of equality the news of the day and the hopes and fears which he built upon it.

Aline's preconceptions on the score of birth and rank discovered for her in this, in the earnestness with which Monsieur would canvass her opinions and in the attention with which he would listen to them when expressed, a very subtle flattery. The regard which he invariably showed her served to increase her regard both for him and for herself. His patience in straitened circumstances, his fortitude in the face of adversity, brought her to perceive in him a personal nobility which gratified her every expectation, lent a romantic glamour to his clumsy, almost plebeian exterior. In the background, to confirm her perception in him of these truly princely qualities and to quicken her admiration of them, stood that born intriguer, the Mephistophelian d'Entragues with dark ends of his own to serve.

The ambitions of the Comte d'Entragues aimed high, as we know. He had known how to render himself indispensable to the Regent. It was for him to maintain himself in this position, to the end that when the restoration came he should be the first man in the State. D'Avaray's high favour with Monsieur offered the only possible obstacle to the ultimate full achievement of that ambition. The Comte d'Avaray owed his position in the first instance to Madame de Balbi. It was she who had placed him at Monsieur's side and between them d'Avaray and de Balbi ruled his highness. Let Madame de Balbi be thrust from her high

place as *maîtresse-en-titre*, and d'Avaray's security would be shaken at the same time. Therefore, it was against her that d'Entraques directed his underground attack. Several already had been the ladies who had aroused his hopes. But the Regent in these affairs was just a callow, ostentatious boaster. Not only must he kiss and tell; but to him kissing without telling would scarcely be worth the trouble. Through all his infidelities, Monsieur had continued, after his fashion, faithful to Madame de Balbi. But now at last d'Entraques foresaw an affair of quite another order. Ever on the alert, he had observed in Monsieur's eyes when they dwelt upon the delicate Mademoiselle de Kercadiou, something upon which solidly to build his hopes. And the study of Aline, herself, had confirmed him. Here, either his highness would never prevail, or else, if he prevailed, Mademoiselle de Kercadiou's rule would be absolute. Thus had d'Entraques come to regard her as the one person who might achieve the complete and permanent eclipse of the Balbi.

But like all truly efficient and dangerous intriguers, d'Entraques never hurried matters; as long as he beheld them travelling, however slowly, in the desired direction, he practised patience. He had perceived the obstacle to his aims in Mademoiselle de Kercadiou's attachment to André-Louis Moreau. So whilst on the one hand he was irritated by the intervention of de Batz in a province which he regarded as his own, he found compensation in the fact that de Batz was removing Moreau for the time being from Mademoiselle de Kercadiou's neighbourhood. His satisfaction in this had been immeasurably increased by the perception that Monsieur himself had welcomed this removal. To this and to this only, had d'Entraques assigned the sudden volte-face, the sudden assumption of graciousness towards those two adventurers, in defiance even of Monsieur d'Artois, by which the Regent had made sure that André-Louis Moreau should accompany the Baron de Batz to France.

You conceive, therefore, the secret satisfaction with which d'Entraques ushered Monsieur de Langéac and the story of Moreau's end to his highness. And he fancied that the Regent's glance had brightened even whilst he expressed grief at that young adventurer's untoward death encountered in the service of the House of Bourbon.

There was, however, no suspicion of brightness in the Regent's glance when he went to pay his visit that afternoon to Monsieur de Kercadiou. His gloom was so marked that as uncle and niece rose to receive him Aline cried out at once with sincere solicitude.

"Monseigneur! You have had bad news."

He stared at them lugubriously from the doorway. He fetched a heavy sigh, half raised his right hand, then let it fall again. "How quick, mademoiselle, are your perceptions! How very quick!"

"Ah, monseigneur, who is not quick to perceive the signs of distress in those we love and honour?"

He moved forward with that ponderous, jerky gait of his to the chair which Monsieur de Kercadiou made haste to set for him. The Comte d'Entraques, who was in attendance paused to close the door.

Some roses culled by Aline that morning stood in a bowl of green ware upon the table, their presence lending a grace to the modest chamber, their fragrance sweetening the air of it.

His highness settled himself in the chair. He yielded to the habit of thrusting the ferrule of his cane into the side of his shoe. His glance was upon the ground.

"My heart is heavy, indeed," he said. "The attempt to save her majesty has failed, and failed in such circumstances that no renewal of the attempt would appear possible."

There was a silence. The Regent fidgeted with his cane. Aline's countenance betrayed her sincere distress. It was Monsieur de Kercadiou at last who spoke.

"And Monsieur de Batz? Monsieur de Batz and those who were with him?"

Monsieur avoided the straining eyes of Aline. His voice came huskily. His tone suggested reservations. "Monsieur de Batz is safe."

D'Entraques did not miss the shiver that ran through Mademoiselle, or the sudden pallor that made her staring eyes look black.

"And . . . and the others?" she asked in a dry, unsteady voice. "The others? Monsieur Moreau? What of Monsieur Moreau, monseigneur?"

There was silence. Monsieur's glance continued intent upon the waxed floor. It was clear that he could not bear to look at her. He moved his shoulders a little. He sighed and his plump hand was raised and lowered again in a gesture of helplessness. Gently d'Entraques answered for him.

"We have cause to fear the worst, mademoiselle."

"You have cause . . . What cause? Tell me, monsieur."

"In God's name, monsieur!" cried Kercadiou.

Monsieur d'Entraques found it easier to address himself to the Lord of Gavrilac. "There is room for no hope at all touching Monsieur Moreau."

"You mean that he is . . . dead?"

"Alas, monsieur."

Kercadiou made an inarticulate noise, and put up his hands as if to ward a blow. Mademoiselle, ashen-faced, staggered back to a chair, and sat down abruptly, her hands limp in her lap, her eyes staring straight before her.

The room and its tenants dissolved out of her vision. In its place came a scene of crisp snow under sunshine dappled with the shadows of snow-clad branches beside a dark-flowing stream; and there keeping step with her strode André-Louis, straight, slim, masterful, alert and intensely alive. That was her last, clearest memory of her vivid lover as he had walked with her on a morning half a year ago.

And then she grew conscious once more of the room in which she sat. She found the Regent standing over her, his hand upon her shoulder. It seemed to her that it was his touch which had pulled her back into the hideous present. He was uttering a protest, in his thick, purring voice.

"D'Entragues, you were too abrupt. You should have used more care, you fool."

Next she heard her own voice, oddly level and controlled.

"Do not blame Monsieur d'Entragues, monseigneur. Such news is best given quickly and plainly."

"My poor child!" The purring note in his voice grew deeper. His hand pressed more heavily upon her shoulder. "My poor child!" He stood over her, portly, dull-eyed and silent for a long moment, until he found the words he needed. "Of all the sacrifices made in the sacred cause of Throne and Altar, I count none more heavy than this." It might have seemed a startling exaggeration until he explained it. "For, believe me, Mademoiselle, I would suffer anything rather than that pain and sorrow should touch you."

"Monseigneur, you are good. You are very good." She spoke mechanically. A moment later, looking at Monsieur d'Entragues, she asked: "How did it happen?"

"Fetch Langéac," his highness commanded.

Langéac, who had been left waiting below, was brought up. Nervously he stood before this sorrow, to tell the tale of those events in the Rue Charlot.

Aline had no tears. Even now she could scarcely realize this thing. Her senses were in rebellion against belief. It seemed so impossible that André—her André, so quick, so vital, so mercurial in mind and body—should be dead.

Gradually, as Langéac unfolded his tale, conviction was borne in upon her. His story was that Moreau had been killed on the

spot. The probability was converted into certainty out of charitable motives. It had been suggested by d'Entragues, and the Regent had approved it, that thus she would suffer less than if she were tortured by doubts of his possible survival merely that he might perish on the guillotine.

"There I recognize him," she said quietly, when the tale was done. "He gave himself to save another. That is the story of all his life."

Still she had no tears. These were not to come until later, not until she and Madame de Plougastel were in each other's arms, seeking in each other strength to bear this common sorrow.

The Countess had heard the news from her husband. In his ignorance of the relationship in which she stood to André-Louis he had conveyed it to her with a brutal lack of mitigation.

"That boastful fool, de Batz, has failed again, as all might have known he would. And his failure has cost some lives. All that has been accomplished is to save Aline de Kercadiou from the preposterous mésalliance she contemplated. Moreau has been killed."

Receiving no answer, he turned to question her, and found that she had fainted. Amazed, his amazement blent with a certain unreasoned indignation, he stood frowning over her before making any attempt to summon assistance.

When at last she was restored, he pompously demanded explanations. She offered the best she could. She had known André-Louis from his childhood; and then there was her sorrow on behalf of Aline, whose heart would be broken by this dreadful thing. On that she had gone in quest of Mademoiselle de Kercadiou, at once to bear consolation and to seek it, whilst the Lord of Gavrilac, himself deeply afflicted, vainly sought to comfort both.

Monsieur had departed in a gloom deeper than that in which he had come. This was perhaps explained by his first words as they walked in the bright sunshine towards the chalet.

"She would seem to have held that rascal in very deep affection."

Monsieur d'Entragues, tall and elegant at his side, barely repressed a smile.

"All things considered, it is perhaps as well that Monsieur Moreau is out of the way."

"Eh? What?" The Regent stood still, a startled man. Had he heard in the words of the Count an echo of his own thoughts.

Monsieur d'Entragues' view of the matter accorded with

Monsieur de Plougastel's. "Had he lived an unhappy més-alliance might have resulted."

"Ah!" The Regent took a deep breath, and moved on. "That is my own view of the matter. But I must wish that her distress had been less sharp."

"Mademoiselle de Kercadiou is young. At her age grief is soon conquered."

"We must do our best to comfort the poor child, d'Entragues."

"Why, yes. That becomes almost a duty."

"A duty, d'Entragues. A duty. That is the word. Moreau died in my service, after all. Yes a duty."

CHAPTER XLX

REPAYMENT

MONSIEUR DE LANGÉAC'S story that André-Louis Moreau had been killed in the Rue Charlot, which he and those who charitably bade him tell it as charitably hoped might be true, was entirely false.

André-Louis recovered consciousness long before they brought him to the headquarters of the Section. In fact, he made most of the journey thither upon his own feet. By the time his senses cleared and coherent thought was added once more to mere physical impressions he came to the opinion subsequently expressed by Monsieur de Langéac that it would have been a better thing for him if he had been finished outright in that rough-and-tumble. In that case his dying would have been completely done by now; whereas at present it still lay before him; and he would have to travel to it by the unpleasant way of the Place de la Revolution and the National Barber. Of this there was in his mind no shadow of doubt. Not even the far-reaching influence wielded by de Batz could accomplish the miracle of delivering a man taken red-handed in the business with which André-Louis would be charged.

It was long after midnight when they reached the headquarters of the Section and at that hour there was no one there before whom

he could be brought for examination. Simon, himself, however, formally demanded his name, age and place of abode so that he might enter them upon the register. But André-Louis could not suffer Simon to go beyond these matters.

"You may be a police agent. But you are not a judge. And you have no authority to question me. Therefore, I shall not answer you."

They deprived him of his pistols, money, watch and papers. They thrust him into a small, almost windowless room in a cellar, whose only furniture was a three-legged stool and a pile of unclean straw to serve for a bed, and there they left him for the night to reflect upon the abrupt and unpleasant end to his kingmaking.

At eight o'clock in the morning they haled him from his cell, and despite his demands for food, he was marched away with his fast unbroken. Six National Guards of the Section formed his escort, and Simon accompanied them.

They crossed the river by the Bridge of the Louvre and came to the Tuileries before nine. There, in the spacious entrance hall, the Citizen Simon was informed that the Committee of Public Safety would not be in session until noon, as its members were in the Convention. But the president was in his office and would deal with the matter if it was urgent. Simon, whose sense of his own consequence was hourly increasing, noisily proclaimed it of the greatest national urgency. The usher led the way up the great staircase. Simon stepped beside him. André-Louis followed between two guards the other four remained below.

They came by the wide gallery to a lofty chamber with gilded furnishings and damask panels which still showed signs of the damage suffered in the assault upon the Palace nearly a year ago.

Here the usher left them, whilst he passed beyond a tall, ornate door to announce the Citizen Simon's business to the president.

They were kept waiting some time. The grimy, bow-legged agent began to grumble. Pacing the polished floor, he demanded to be informed by no one in particular whether they had returned to the days of the Capets and the manners of the despots that a patriot should be left cooling his heels in an ante-chamber which the Citizen Simon qualified by unprintable adjectives.

The two National Guards enjoyed his picturesque invective. André-Louis scarcely heard and certainly did not heed it. His thoughts were leagues away, in the Bear Inn at Hamm, with his Aline. How would she take the news of his end when it was borne to her? She would suffer. That was inevitable. But

he prayed that she might not suffer too acutely, and that resignation and consolation would follow soon. Later, perhaps, love might come to her again. She might marry and be the happy mother of children. It was what he must desire for her since he loved her. And yet the thought of it seared his soul. She was so much his own that the contemplation of her possible possession by another was intolerable. But for this he might now be confronting his fate with a greater resignation.

His spirit sought to bridge the distance between them, to reach her and make her aware of him. If only he could write to her : pack into one final glowing letter all the passion and worship which he had never yet expressed ! But how was he from a revolutionary prison to dispatch a letter to an aristocrat in exile ? Even this little consolation would be denied him. He must die without having told her the half of his devotion.

He was roused from the anguish of these reflections by the return of the usher.

With the opening of the door the Citizen Simon's grumblings instantly ceased. This champion of equality shed the last vestige of his magnificent independence when they entered the presence of the president of the dread committee. Cringing a little, he waited with exemplary patience while the neat, powdered head presented to them continued bowed over the writing upon which its owner was engaged.

In a silence broken only by the swift scratching of the writer's pen, and the ticking of the Ormolu timepiece on the tall fluted overmantel, they continued to wait. Even when the writing ceased, and the president spoke at last, he did not look up. He continued bowed over his table, which was covered by a claret-coloured serge cloth reaching to the ground, and his eyes remained engaged upon what he had written.

"What is this story of an attempt to procure the escape of the Widow Capet from the Temple ?"

The Citizen Simon began to speak. "May it please you, Citizen-President," was the deferential opening with which he introduced a tale in which he assigned himself a very noble part. No false sense of modesty prevented him from making the fullest parade of his acumen, intrepidity and burning patriotism. He was still at the shrewdness of the inferences which had led to his denunciation of Michonis when the president interrupted him.

"Yes, yes. I am informed of all that. Come to the business at the Temple."

The Citizen Simon, flung out of balance by that hectoring interruption, silently sought a fresh starting point. At last the

Citizen-President raised his head and confirmed the assumptions André-Louis had already formed from the voice, by disclosing the narrow swarthy face and impertinent nose of Le Chapelier. But it was a countenance oddly changed in the few months since André-Louis had last beheld it. It had lost flesh. The bone structures were more prominent. A grey pallor overspread it. Lines of care were deeply carved between the brows, and the eyes were the eyes of a haunted man, strained and anxious. André-Louis, with pulses suddenly quickened, awaited an explosion. None came. Beyond a momentary lift of his fine brows, so momentary that only André-Louis perceived it, Le Chapelier gave no sign of recognition. Deliberately he levelled a gold-rimmed quizzing glass, the better to survey the prisoner, and again his dry voice spoke.

"Whom have you there?"

"But as I am telling you, Citizen-President, this is one of the men who made possible the escape of that aristocrat scoundrel de Batz. He had the impudence to declare himself an agent of the Committee of Public Safety." And Simon pursued his tale of the encounter in the Rue Charlot. But when it was done there was no such panegyric as he was expecting and believed that he had earned; there was not even a single word of commendation.

Instead, the president, ever impassive, asked a question, a question that further quickened the prisoner's pulses.

"You say that this man proclaimed himself an agent of the Committee of Public Safety. Did you take steps to verify that this was not true?"

The Citizen Simon's mouth fell open. He stared foolishly. The question was coldly repeated.

"Did you take steps to verify that the Citizen Moreau is not one of our agents?"

Higher mounted the zealous patriot's amazement.

"You know his name, Citizen-President?"

"Answer my question."

"But . . . But . . ." The Citizen Simon was bewildered. He sensed here something that was entirely wrong. He stammered, paused, then plunged precipitately. "Why, this man is known to be a constant associate of the ci-devant Baron de Batz, whom I have told you that I surprised in the act of attempting to enter the Temple."

"That is not what I asked you," Le Chapelier's voice became of an increasing asperity. "Do you know, citizen, that you do not impress me very favourably. I have a low opinion of men

who cannot answer questions. It argues something amiss either with their sagacity or their honesty."

"But, Citizen-President——"

"Silence! You will withdraw, and wait in the antechamber until I send for you again. Take your men with you. Citizen Moreau, you will remain." He tinkled a bell on his table

Simon's ugly mouth was twisted in angry astonishment. But he dared offer no answer to so definite an order from a despot invested with the authority of that sacred trinity, liberty, equality and fraternity.

The usher appeared, and Simon, scowling his chagrin, marched out of the presence followed by his guards. The tall door closed again leaving André-Louis and Le Chapelier alone together

The deputy regarded the prisoner solemnly for some moments. Then the thin lips smiled curiously.

"I heard some days ago that you were in Paris, André. I was wondering when you would have the politeness to pay me a visit."

André-Louis met dryness with dryness.

"Acquit me of impoliteness, Isaac. I feared to intrude upon so busy a man."

"I see. Well, you are here at last."

They continued to look at each other. André-Louis found the situation almost droll, but not very hopeful.

"Tell me," said Le Chapelier presently "To what extent are you involved with this de Batz?"

"He is a friend of mine."

"Not a very desirable friend in these days, especially for a man of your history."

"Considering my history I am not perhaps a very desirable friend for him."

"Perhaps not. But my concern is with you, now that you have had the clumsiness to allow yourself to be taken. What the devil am I to do with you?"

"I appreciate the concern, my dear Isaac. You will believe I am sure, that I am desolated to be the cause of it."

The president's myopic eyes considered him grimly.

"I have no difficulty in believing it. Fate, it seems, is determined to fling us across each other's paths however we may strive to travel in opposite directions. Tell me frankly, André: What is the truth of this business at the Temple last night?"

"But how should I know? If you choose to believe the ridiculous story of that foul dog who brought me here . . ."

"My difficulty is that belief in his story is not to be avoided.

And we want to avoid it, not only I, myself, but my colleagues on the Committee of Public Safety. Your arrest gives it an awkward measure of confirmation. You are extraordinarily inopportune, André."

"I make you my apologies, Isaac."

"Of course, I could have you quietly guillotined."

"I should prefer it to be done quietly if it must be done. I have always deprecated ostentation."

"Unfortunately there's a debt between us."

"My dear Isaac! What is a debt between friends?"

"Shall we be serious?"

"If you can tell me of a more serious situation than mine you will astonish me."

Le Chapelier made a movement of impatience. "You cannot suppose, as you seem to be pretending, that I do not desire to help you?"

"I have already perceived with gratitude indications of it. But there must be a limit to your power in a State in which any ragamuffin may dictate to a minister."

"One of these days, Scaramouche, you'll sacrifice your head for a retort. At the moment you are luckier than you know. Probably luckier than you deserve, not only in that chance brings you before me instead of before the assembled committee, but because the general situation demands that Simon's story should not be believed. If you and your friends have been trying to rescue the heretofore Queen, you have been uselessly endangering your necks. I'll tell you a secret. Negotiations with Vienna are well advanced to put her across the frontier in exchange for Bournonville and the other deputies now in Austrian hands. Knowledge that an attempt has been made to rescue her might inflame the populace and raise obstacles to a desirable political measure. The tale of this attempt to enter the Temple we could brush aside. But your arrest creates a difficulty. There must be awkward disclosures when we put you on your trial."

"I am desolated to prove so inconvenient."

Le Chapelier ignored the interruption. "On the other hand, if I set you at liberty, we shall have that fellow Simon stirring up trouble and denouncing us all as having been bought by Pitt and Coburg."

"My poor Isaac! You appear to be upon the horns of a dilemma. Your perplexities appropriate the sympathy I was reserving for myself."

"Devil take you, André!" Le Chapelier slapped the table with his hand. "Will you cease to play Scaramouche, and show

me what I am to do?" He got up. "It is anything but easy. I am not the committee, after all; and I shall have to render some account to my colleagues. On what grounds can I let you go?"

He came forward and set a hand on André-Louis' shoulder. "Short of mounting the scaffold in your place, there is nothing I will not do to save you."

"My dear Isaac!" This time there was no lightness in André-Louis' tone.

"You don't flatter me if it surprises you. There was that affair at Coblenz."

"The cases are not by any means parallel. There I had no duty to anyone, and I was consequently free to assist you. You, unfortunately, are saddled with a duty to your office, which will hardly——"

Le Chapelier interrupted him. "My office! Ha! My duty to that wears thin, André. Our revolution has taken a queer twist. There are few of its original architects left. I might easily have gone with the Girondins—the last of those who stood for order."

André-Louis thought that he held the explanation of that strained, haunted look which he had discovered on Le Chapelier's face. The man must be sorely ridden indeed by misgivings and fears to permit himself these expressions.

He took his hand from André-Louis' shoulder, and paced away, again to the table and back, his chin in his neckcloth, his pallid brow furrowed by thought. Suddenly he checked to ask a question.

"Will you accept service if I offer it to you?"

"Service?"

"It is at least to the good that you announced yourself to this fellow Simon as an agent of the Committee of Public Safety."

"As an agent?" There was repudiation in the very tone of the question.

"Does it shock you? Are you not already an agent of the Bourbons? Is it unusual for agents to accept service from both sides at once?" Le Chapelier spoke contemptuously. "I could explain that I am setting you to watch the counter-revolutionaries, who believe you to be one of themselves. Your service to me at Coblenz was really a service to the revolutionary party. I published it in committee on my return, and it will serve now as a guarantee of your good faith. It would be readily believed that, your presence here, your association with certain counter-

revolutionaries, results from an arrangement made between us at Coblenz. Do you understand?"

"Oh, perfectly. And I thank you." André-Louis was ironical. "But on the whole I think the guillotine will be cleaner."

"I see that you don't understand at all. I am not asking you to do anything more than accept enrolment. It is merely so as to enable you to get away."

André-Louis frowned as he stared in surprise at the other. "But you, Isaac? What then of you? If you sponsor me, and I fail to perform the duties of the office; if I use it to make my escape? What, then, of you?"

"Do not let that concern you."

"But it must. You will endanger your own neck."

Slowly Le Chapelier shook his head. He smiled with tight lips. "I shall not be here to answer. I shall have ceased to count." Instinctively he lowered his voice. "I am about to start for England on a secret mission to Pitt, in an endeavour to detach the English from the coalition. It is the last reputable service which in the present pass a man of decency may render this unfortunate country. When it is done, whether it succeeds or not, I do not think that I shall return. For here," he added bitterly, "there will be nothing more that an honest man can do. That is another secret, André. I disclose it, so that you may know precisely what I offer."

André-Louis took only a moment to consider.

"In the circumstances, I should be worse than a fool if I refused, or if I forgot to count myself lucky in your friendship, Isaac."

Le Chapelier shrugged aside the commendation. "I pay my debts where I can." He returned to his writing-table. "I have here your civic card. I'll prepare your commission as an agent of the Public Safety, and have it countersigned as soon as the committee sits, which will be within the next two hours. You will wait in the antechamber until I send it to you. Armed with it, you must protect yourself." He held out his hand. "This time, André, it is good-bye, I think."

Their handclasp was firm, and it endured for a long moment, during which they looked into each other's eyes. Then Le Chapelier took up a bell from the table and tinkled it.

The usher came in. Le Chapelier, calm and dry of manner, gave his instructions.

"The Citizen Moreau will await my orders in the antechamber. Reconduct him, and send the Citizen Simon to me at once."

The bowlegged Simon, still deep in bewilderment, entered to

receive the belated thanks of the president of the Committee of Public Safety for his diligence in the service of the Nation. Instead he was offered a cold lecture upon the errors into which a man may be led by acting with excessive zeal upon unreliable information. He was assured that he had perpetrated a series of blunders in the course of discovering a conspiracy which had never existed, and in the pursuit of a conspirator who had never been present, and he was warned that any further scaremongering on the subject would be attended by the gravest consequences to himself.

The Citizen Simon, going red and white by turns under that incisive admonition, demanded at the end of it to know if he were to reject the evidence of his own senses. There was a certain feeble attempt at truculence in the posing of the question.

"Undoubtedly," the president answered him without hesitation, "since those senses have proved so entirely unreliable. You have maligned two valued servants of the Nation in the persons of Michonis and Cortey, against whom you are unable to make good your accusations, and you have assaulted yet another in the person of the Citizen Moreau. These are grave matters, Citizen Simon. I will remind you that we are no longer in the days of the despots when the lives and liberties of men were at the mercy of any functionary, and I recommend you in future to exercise more circumspection. You are fortunate to be at liberty to go, Citizen Simon."

The ardent champion of liberty, equality and fraternity stumbled out of the room as if he had been bludgeoned.

CHAPTER XX

MAMMON

AN ironical spice is added to the facts when it is considered how few were the hours that elapsed between the departure of Monsieur de Langéac from Charonne to bear the news of Moreau's end to Hamm, and the arrival at Charonne of Monsieur Moreau himself and how narrow was the margin of time by which so much of what followed might have been averted.

Monsieur de Langéac had set out provided with a forged passport which was the competent work of Balthazar Roussel whose accomplishments in penmanship, engraving and other kindred arts rendered him one of the most valuable members of the Baron's little army of underground workers. It was Balthazar Roussel who was responsible for the activities of the little printing-press installed in a cellar of that country house at Charonne, which provided by far the most perfect of all the false paper money of the Republic with which France was flooded to the embarrassment of the government and the constant depreciation of the currency. That, however is by the way.

Monsieur de Langéac had been gone not more than six hours, and the June twilight was deepening when to that quiet, lonely house at Charonne came at last André-Louis Moreau whom they were mourning.

They were assembled—de Batz, Devaux, Boissancourt, Roussel and the Marquis de la Guiche—in the library: a long, low chamber, communicating with the dining-room, and with windows opening upon the lawn, beyond which rose the trees of the woods of Bagnolet. They sat there in the gloaming with few words passing, a little band of men too dejected and depressed by failure to address themselves to the conception of any future plans.

Babette de Grandmaison came in to light the candles and draw the curtains.

She had scarcely completed the task, when the door opened abruptly, and André-Louis, hat in hand, appeared upon the threshold. There was a general gasp, a moment's astonished pause, then a sudden rising, and Babette ran to fling her arms about the newcomer's neck, kissing him resonantly on one cheek after the other.

"This is to make sure that he is not a ghost," she informed the company.

The Baron was wringing André-Louis' hand as if he would tear it from the wrist, his dark eyes preternaturally bright. He was dragged forward, bombarded with questions, laughed over, almost wept over by those men whose gloom had been suddenly cast off.

He explained his escape, made possible by his old friend and associate Le Chapelier, and by the fortunate circumstance that the Committee of Public Safety desired no publication of any attempt to rescue the Queen. They were consoled for their failure when they learnt that her deliverance was as good as assured without any exertion of their own. But there were reticences on both sides. André-Louis said nothing of his enrol-

ment as an agent of the Committee of Public Safety ; this chiefly because he attached no importance to it. De Batz, on his side, in deploring now that Langéac should already have set out for Hamm, said nothing of the conviction in which he had departed. But even as it was that departure was sufficiently alarming to André-Louis.

"He will inform them that I have been arrested !"

And upon that he vowed that unless a messenger could be found upon the morrow who would so ride as to reach Hamm, if possible, ahead of Langéac, he would set out himself to return to Westphalia.

From this it followed that early next morning de Batz accompanied him to Paris, in quest of the necessary messenger. They began by paying a visit to Pommelles at Bourg Egalité—the old Bourg la Reine—and here, providentially, as it seemed, they found a courier from d'Entraques on the point of setting out to return to Hamm. His departure was delayed no longer than it took André-Louis to write a letter to reassure Aline and his godfather on the subject of his fate.

This done, he remained with de Batz in Paris, so as to keep an appointment on the morrow with the Representative Delaunay, at the house of Benoît the banker. They could address themselves with a better spirit to the major project with which this appointment was concerned since the news André-Louis had brought of the government's intentions towards the Queen relieved de Batz of the dejection consequent upon his failure. Delaunay came to the appointment accompanied by yet another conventional named Julien, a tall, dry man with a narrow, yellow face and sly eyes, an erstwhile Protestant minister who had unfrocked himself and renounced the faith so that he might exchange religion for politics. Delaunay had by now entirely overcome any scruples about availing himself of the advantages of his position in the government offered. And Julien, who represented Toulouse in the Convention, had attached himself to Delaunay in the hope of participating in the operations by which the deputy for Angers was to enrich himself.

These hopes, however, received from André-Louis, to the general surprise, a check at the very outset of their interview. He made difficulties. He pointed out to the conventionals a danger in discovery.

"An enemy who seeks your ruin," he warned them, "might charge you with peculation. And in these days, with suspicion in the very air we breathe, an impeachment of your probity might easily succeed, even if without foundation."

Taken aback, they demanded to know who need ever discover their share in these transactions.

"You will grow rich," André-Louis replied. "The source of your wealth may be called in question."

"But by whom, in God's name?" cried Julien, galled to see wealth within his reach and yet to be counselled against seizing it.

"By those who have the right. Your fellow conventionals, who will be in prey to the envy you will excite. That is the risk you will run."

Delaunay brushed the difficulty aside. A man in love, he was reckless and impatient of obstacles between himself and the object of his desires.

"Nothing is ever accomplished without risks."

The portly florid banker listened in mild bewilderment. De Batz himself, without yet perceiving André-Louis' aim, remained impassive, even when the young man's next words served further to daunt the allies it was desired to win.

"You are right, of course, citizen. But in your place I should take every precaution before setting out upon a road which, without them, may lead to the guillotine."

Julien shivered, and wrung one bony hand in the other. "Ah, that, no! Name of God! If that's the risk——"

"Wait," growled Delaunay to silence him. "You speak of precautions, Citizen Moreau. You have something in mind, that's plain. Of what precautions are you thinking?"

"Were I in your place I know exactly what I should do. I should begin by associating with myself in these operations some of the more prominent men in the party of the Mountain, which to-day is the only party that counts. I should make choice of some man well in the public eye; some man who stands so high in public favour, whose virtue is so well-established that he is unassailable; a man, in short, whom it would be perilous to attack because scandal against him would recoil upon the heads of those that utter it. Such a man, whilst safe in himself by virtue of his unimpeachable position, would render you safe by your association with him."

The incipient despondency of the two deputies began to lift. Whilst Delaunay was thoughtfully nodding, Julien inquired bluntly whether the Citizen Moreau had anyone in mind. The Citizen Moreau, a trifle dubiously, named Robespierre, who was now virtually the leader of the Mountain and whose star was rapidly ascending to its zenith in the revolutionary firmament.

Delaunay laughed with a touch of scorn. "Morbieu! If we could bring in Robespierre we should be safe indeed. But

Robespierre! My friend, you do not know the man. He is afraid of money. It is not for nothing that they call him the Incorruptible. He is hardly normal in his tastes. He is just a vanity in human shape. His only appetite is for power. That he will achieve by any means, or perish in the attempt. But apart from that he is purity itself. If I were to show him how he might enrich himself, his almost certain answer would be to impeach me for peculation before the revolutionary tribunal, and send me to the guillotine. No, no my friend. We can leave out Robespierre."

"There is Danton," Julien suggested, tentatively. "No one can pretend that his hands are clean in money matters. He is becoming a considerable landowner, I am told; and there is little doubt that he and his friend Fabre have been dipping their fingers into the national treasury."

But André-Louis would have neither one nor the other.

"They are already tainted, and, therefore, vulnerable. Your need, citizens, demands men of spotless purity in money matters. That is why I named Robespierre——"

Delaunay attempted impatiently to interrupt him. "But Robespierre——"

André-Louis held up his lean hand. "You have made me realize that Robespierre is unapproachable. But consider him a moment with me. Neither of you was in the Constituent Assembly, of which I was a member, representing Ancenis. I remember the deputy for the Third Estate of Arras from those days: an insignificant little pedant, who gave himself airs, who very occasionally was permitted to address the Assembly, and almost invariably sent it to sleep by his dullness when he did so. In himself and left to himself, Robespierre would never have become anything. Bumptious, maladroit and tiresome, he would never have done more than weary people. You agree with me, I hope."

The deputies remained stolid before this frankness of criticism of one who since the fall of the Girondins had fast been rising to the first place in the Convention. André-Louis continued.

"He has risen to the position he occupies as a result of the efforts of his friends. Saint-Just sees God in him, or at least the high-priest of such a divinity as Saint-Just desires to worship, and it is Saint-Just's clear eloquence which mends Robespierre's paucity of expression for ideas admittedly his own. Couthon is such another champion. Basire another. Chabot another. You know them, these pillars upon which Robespierre is supported. It is amongst them that you must look for your asso-

ciate. For if trouble followed Robespierre would assuredly rise to protect any of these supporters upon whom, for all his vanity, he knows that his own position is dependent."

Convinced, they proceeded to pass them in review. Saint-Just, of course, was the first whose qualifications they weighed. That terrible young man, however, seemed invulnerable. Considering his closeness to Robespierre, it was assumed that he might at present share Robespierre's fear of money. Next, the cripple Couthon, with his magnificent head and useless legs, seemed hardly a likely subject for temptation. Basire was mentioned, and about Basire they debated for some time, until at last André-Louis, who knew exactly what he wanted, urged François Chabot.

An unfrocked capuchin of appalling antecedents, François Chabot was to such an extent the victim of two passions, women and money, that Delaunay was of the opinion that in the pursuit of either only his natural cowardice would deter him.

"The temptation," said André-Louis, "must be made heavy enough to counterbalance his fears."

The masks were off by now, and they were talking with the utmost frankness. André-Louis continued to expound.

"It is worth an effort to win Chabot. He stands high in the councils of the Mountain. He stands higher still in the esteem of the people. As a patriot his zeal has been shown to amount to fanaticism. It was he who discovered the Austrian Committee, which, as everybody knows, never existed at all. It was his denunciations which helped to overthrow the Girondins. Next to Marat there is no man in public life to-day whom the rabble worships more completely; and to one who depends as Robespierre does upon the people's favour, Chabot is an inestimable ally since he commands it. Bring Chabot into these operations, whether concerned with speculation in émigré property, whether covering a still wider field, and you may pursue them without fear of denunciation, if only because the arch-denouncer will be your ally. Bring in Basire as well by all means. But spare no effort to win François Chabot."

And so it was agreed that his brother deputies should bring Chabot to dine at Charonne one day soon, so that he might be enmeshed in the viscous net that André-Louis was preparing for them all.

CHAPTER XXI

THE TEMPTING OF CHABOT

DELAUNAY's impatience would brook no postponement of that excursion to Charonne beyond the following *Décadi*, the Republican Sunday—for the Revolutionary Calendar, which divided the week into ten days, the month into three weeks and the year into twelve months, had by now been adopted. So, on the next *Décadi*, three days later, the two deputies and the banker drove out to Charonne, taking with them that stalwart champion of the Mountain, François Chabot, who represented the department of Loir-et-Cher in the National Convention.

They dined early in the afternoon, in the garden, just the six of them, with the Citoyenne Grandmaison to do the honours of the table as hostess. La Guiche, Roussel and the others had temporarily effaced themselves. Under the lime trees, from which the ardent June sun was drawing the fragrance, a feast was spread with abundance of choice wines to which the deputies did the fullest justice.

François Chabot, now in his thirty-fifth year, was a stiffly-built, vigorous little man with a lively, good-humoured face that was fairly full in the cheeks. His nose was disproportionately large, and made a line with his deplorable brow which sloped away to be lost in a mass of brown curls. He had the full lips of the sensualist and a prominent chin in which there was a dimple. His eyes were good, and in their seeming alertness simulated an intelligence altogether greater than that which lay behind them. In dress he observed a patriotic and unclean slovenliness; his clustering brown curls were ill-kempt, and generally he did not suggest that soap and water played any considerable part in his daily habits. In manners as in appearance he was gross and uncouth, betraying constantly his plebeian origin.

Nevertheless he was unquestionably a great man in the State, and he seemed destined for yet further greatness. His popularity dated back to the moment when he had discarded the capuchin habit so impatiently worn for fifteen years, so that he might assume instead the tricolour cockade and procure election to the Legislative Assembly. No gesture could have been more symbolical of the casting-off of the trammels of superstition, or could more sharply and favourably have drawn attention to him. Of this he had known how to take the fullest advantage. Eyes and ears were not turned in vain upon the new deputy. His

commonplace mind imposed no restraints upon his use of the turgid eloquence that emotionally sweeps the rabble off its feet. And then the ardent patriotism revealed in his denunciations ! He was a very sleuth-hound of republicanism on the trail of every aristocratic or counter-revolutionary activity.

Few orators occupied the tribune as frequently, both in the Convention and the clubs. He discovered plot after plot, most of which had no real existence, and if there were some in the Convention who sneered at him and his interminable fiery denunciations, yet his popularity with the mob rose ever higher, so that even those who sneered were compelled to recognize him for a power in the land, to be ranked among the half-dozen men at most to whom the Nation looked for leadership.

The rugged, downright Danton made the mistake of despising him, stigmatizing his denunciations as capucinades, in contemptuous allusion to his conventual antecedents. This merely had the effect of ranging Chabot entirely on the side of Robespierre in the great struggle for mastery that was just beginning.

At the moment he came fresh from the triumph of his latest denunciation which had been hurled at the Deputy Condorcet's criticisms of the new constitution. Together with this, Chabot had announced the discovery of the latest conspiracy against the State in which he had implicated several prominent men. If there were still in the Convention some who were daring enough to deride his accusations, yet such was his authority that the seals had been placed, by his demand, upon the private papers of three whom he denounced.

After these labours, the deputy for Loir-et-Cher may have felt that he owed himself a little relaxation. Delaunay's suggestion that they should spend a day in the country, at a house where a good table was kept with a charming hostess to preside over it, came opportunely.

Delaunay had understated the case when he attributed only two passions to Chabot. The capuchin's starved youth had left him a sensualist in every direction. He loved good food and good wine as much as he loved all the other pleasures of the flesh. Indeed, his history justifies us in describing him as a glutton and a drunkard. These proclivities he could rarely indulge save at other men's tables, for despite his avidity for money he remained poor. He had never discovered how money could be made, so ingenuous was he in matters of finance ; and it had never yet occurred to him that ways of enriching himself were ready to the hand of a man who had climbed to his position,

These omissions in the ex-capuchin's education were to be repaired by André-Louis under the limes in the garden at Charonne. They had plied him steadily with wine, and added to it the intoxication of skilful flattery, until the man's wits were addled. He had grown increasingly voluble, and increasingly at ease in his manners. He had addressed himself with an ever-growing familiarity to the handsome Babette, and he was ogling her fondly when the repast, being ended, she rose to withdraw. Protesting against her departure, he rose with her, seized her about the waist and sought to compel her to sit down again. In the struggle he even kissed her, and there was a moment when Delaunay, aware of the relations between de Batz and the lady, was afraid that the lecherous capuchin would not only ruin their hopes, but himself come to grief. The blood indeed, was rising to the Gascon's swarthy face when a kick and a wink from André-Louis recalled to him the need for prudence.

The dark, queenly Babette, meanwhile, played her difficult part with skill. Dissembling her disgust at the uncouth deputy's too physical attentions, she laughed lightly, almost coquettishly, as she disengaged herself. With a promise to return so soon as the household duties claiming her would permit she tripped away across the lawn.

Chabot was disposing himself to go in pursuit of her when the massive Delaunay heaved himself up, took the ex-capuchin by the shoulders, and almost flung him down again on his chair.

"A little circumspection, name of a name," the Augévin growled at him.

Chabot, almost winded by the violence, sat still. Only his smouldering eyes followed the graceful figure as it moved across the lawn to the long, low white house with its green shutters. He was a little aggrieved. There had been a distinct implication in Delaunay's mention of a charming hostess. Charming Chabot had certainly found her. But surely of an excessive coyness, an utterly unnecessary aloofness.

To create a diversion, de Batz poured wine for him. The deputy fetched a sigh, and sipped it appreciatively, taking from it what compensation he could for other joys which it seemed were to elude him. And then at last, with some abruptness the conversation turned on money. It was Benoît, the banker, who was also of the party who tossed that ball among these players.

"Morableu, de Batz," he said, "that last operation of yours must have brought you in at least a hundred thousand francs."

Chabot in the act of drinking almost choked. A hundred thousand francs! God of God! Were there such sums to be

made: But how? He was asking these questions almost before he knew it and André-Louis was laughing as he answered him.

‘On my soul will you affect ingenuousness, Citizen-Representative? Is it for a man of your eminence in the State, a man of your influence and power to ask such a question? For a hundred thousand livres that de Batz may make as a result of infinite pain and labour, there’s a million to be picked up without effort by a man in your position.’

Chabot’s eyes held a look that was almost of consternation.

‘If there is, I should be glad to know more precisely where. I would so, by God!’ He turned upon Benoît. ‘You, who are a banker, a man who makes money by money, though God knows how, what have you to say to that?’

Benoît explained to him the transactions in confiscated property which could be rendered so profitable. A man in Chabot’s position would be among the first to know what was to be bought and what margin of profit it would leave.

Chabot was shocked. ‘You mean, citizen, that I am to abuse the position which by the people’s trust and faith in me I am permitted to occupy?’ He grew stern. ‘Will you tell me how I could justify myself before the tribunal of my conscience?’

‘What justification does a man need who has done no harm?’ quoth André-Louis.

‘No harm?’

‘It must be a surviving impression from your monastic days, citizen, that there is harm in taking profit to yourself. One of the superstitions of a worn-out and discarded kill-joy creed.’

Chabot passed from amazement to amazement. ‘But . . . But surely . . . The profit to myself, whence comes it? Is it not filched from the sacred treasury of the republic? Is not that to commit a sacrilege? Is it not a robbing of the inviolable altars of the nation?’

Gently smiling, André-Louis shook his head. He became apostrophic. ‘Oh, virtuous excess of sensitiveness! What a thrice-blessed age is this in which we live, that men of State, departing from the corrupt habits of their kind in all ages, should hesitate to appropriate even that which rightly belongs to them. Citizen Chabot, I honour you for this hesitation as all men must honour you. But at the same time I grieve that such lofty ideals should give you so false a perspective of the facts; should make you neglect to reach for those rewards which are your right which your labours in the cause of freedom have justly

earned you. I should grieve even more deeply if as a consequence of your neglect of opportunity this wealth should be appropriated by the worthless, by the hucksters and even by the friends of despotism, whilst you and your noble kind continue to labour in necessitous circumstances, almost in want. Will you allow these profits, citizen, which you could spend so worthily to the great honour and glory of the sacred cause of liberty, to fall instead into the hands of corrupt reactionaries who may employ them to undermine the very foundations of this glorious republic you have laboured with such self-abnegation to establish? Have you no duty there, Citizen-Representative?"

The Citizen-Representative blinked at him helplessly.

That flood of turgid rhetoric, of the very kind of which he himself was so remarkable an exponent, which meaning nothing explicitly yet seemed implicit with so much significance, befogged the wits which the wine had already rendered torpid. Through this fog gleamed with increasing vividness the prospect of riches whose acquisition would not affront his sensitive conscience or—which is really the same thing at bottom—imperil his position.

The others maintained an impassive silence. Julien almost shared Chabot's stupefaction, bewildered by the specious cant which André-Louis employed. Delaunay, more clear-sighted, was under no illusions, whilst Benoît and de Batz silently admired both the manner and the matter of André-Louis' retort to the deputy's cry of conscience.

"You mean, citizen?" said Chabot at last. "You mean that if I do not take advantage of these opportunities, others will who might turn the results to evil purposes?"

"I mean much more than that. These operations ensure a ready liquidation of the confiscated properties with immediate returns to the national treasury. What we do, we do openly. There is no stigma attaching to it. The commission entrusted with the sale of lands welcomes our collaboration, without which those sales would be immensely retarded. If then it is not wrong in us, if, indeed, it is considered right in us, can it be less right in you, who are so fully entitled to rewards and have so little opportunity of obtaining them in ordinary ways?"

This was a little clearer. It removed satisfactorily the substance of Chabot's opposition. But the shadow remained.

"That is well for you, citizens," he answered slowly. "The place you occupy does not leave you vulnerable to such reproaches as might be aimed at me. It might be said, my enemies might make it appear, that I turn my position to my own private benefit. My purity of intention would thus become suspect, and under

such suspicion I should no longer be in case to serve my country."

"That is true. Men whose first aim is the service of mankind are peculiarly susceptible to such attacks. Suspicion can wither your powers, the breath of calumny can wilt your forces and lay low your every noble endeavour. But before suspicion or calumny can touch you, some knowledge of the facts must transpire. And what need any know of your transactions?"

Chabot blinked again under his interlocutor's steady regard. Excitement had drawn the blood from his round cheeks. He drained a bumper that once more de Batz had filled for him, and wiped his mouth with the back of his unclean hand.

"You mean that a thing done in secret . . ."

"Name of a name! Is a man to go through life opening the recesses of his heart to the gaze of the multitude? Are you—is any man—under the necessity of putting weapons into the hands of his enemies? You have spoken, citizen, of the tribunal of conscience. A noble image. So long as that is satisfied, are you to trouble about anything else?"

Chabot took his head in his hand, leaning his elbow on the table. "But if I grow rich . . ." He paused. The golden vision dazzled him. He looked back on the grey, needy years, spent in a poverty which had denied him all those lovely things of life which he knew himself peculiarly equipped to enjoy. He thought of occasional banquets to which he had been bidden, even such as this at which he had just been a guest, and contrasted it with the lean fare to which he was normally condemned by his restricted means, he, a man of State, a power in France, one of the pillars of this glorious republic which he had helped to found. Surely some reward was due to him. Yet timidity made him hesitate. If he grew rich how was he to enjoy his riches, how spread himself such tables, guzzle such wines, command such mistresses as dark-eyed Babette who had presided here, without betraying this improvement in his fortunes? Something of the kind he expressed, to be promptly answered by instances of other deputies, from Danton down, who had obviously accumulated wealth without anyone daring to question its sources.

"And these sources," said André-Louis impressively, "are far from being as pure and untainted as those which we reveal to you."

A sudden suspicion flared in Chabot to stay him in the very moment of surrender to these almost irresistible seductions.

"Why do you reveal them? What is your interest in me that you should come to empty Fortune's cornucopia into my lap?"

It was de Batz who answered him, laughing frankly. "Faith the reason is not far to seek. We are not altruists Citizen-Representative. We desire your valuable company. We lead you to the source. But we remain to drink at it with you. Am I plain?"

"Ah! I begin to see. But then . . ." He hiccupped. "Faith! I do not yet see quite clearly."

Delaunay addressed himself to enlightening him. "Should I be in this, François, if I perceived in it the least shade of dishonesty? You are a man of ideals, and you have rarely been in close contact with that greatest of realities, money. I am a man experienced in finance. You may take my word for it that all here is beyond reproach."

Dull eyes regarded him in silence from the deputy's flushed face. Delaunay continued.

"Consider it this way: the only real sufferers in these transactions are the émigrés, who have crossed the frontier so that they may make war upon the country that gave them birth. It is their properties that are to be converted into gold so that the hungry children of France may be fed. Our intervention in these transactions will not lessen by a single liard the sums to be poured into the national treasury. On the contrary, by accelerating the liquidation we do good service to the people."

"Yes, I have perceived that," Chabot admitted, but still with a lack of conviction, still fettered by timidity.

He fell into thought, and presently loosed his retrospections.

"I have been rigorously bound by my scruples in the past. No representative has gone upon more missions than have I, and in each of them I could have made money had I not set my probity above all else. At Castries I was entrusted with four thousand livres for secret expenses, and I collected some twenty thousand livres in fines and ransoms. Not a denier of this found its way into my pockets. My hands have remained clean. And these are trifles compared with other temptations that have come my way. The Spanish minister offered me four millions if I would save Louis Capet from the scaffold. It was a bribe that would have overwhelmed the honesty of many a man. But strong in my patriotism and my sense of duty to the Nation, the temptation never touched me."

It may have been true. But it still remained that the temptation must have lacked point, since Chabot could not have accomplished what was required. As well might the Spanish minister have offered Chabot four millions for the moon.

"Your proposal however," the representative ran on, "is of

a different order. I begin to see that in the manner you suggest I might make a little money honestly. I have made. I confess, a little in the past, a very little, by the favour of two good friends of mine, those good fellows the brothers Frey. And they have reproached me with having neglected my opportunities to make more."

He ran on, parading his honesty and the strength with which in the past he had resisted temptation. And he spoke at length of the Freys, whose very adopted name implied as he pointed out their patriotism and shining republicanism. Their original name was Schönfeld. But they had discarded this when they had left Vienna, quitting it because with the sentiments that inspired them they could live no longer under a rule of despotism. The elder brother, Junius, who so called himself after the founder of Roman liberty, had refused the office of first minister to the Emperor Joseph because he would not bend the knee to a tyrant. These were men who had given proof of their idealism, abandoning wealth and position, so as to come and live in the pure air of liberty in France. They had been good friends to Chabot, and but for his scruples might have been still better. They were skilled in finance, being bankers by profession. He would take counsel with them before he made a final decision in this matter in which he was now invited to co-operate.

If this was a little disappointing to those schemers who had so richly fed the ex-capuchin and so generously plied him with wine, yet they could offer no further insistence without arousing suspicions that might completely scare away so timid a quarry.

And then, even as he was disposing himself to depart, Chabot was assailed by yet another doubt.

"After all, citizens, I was overlooking in my ignorance of finance the fact that to make money in the ways you indicate, money is necessary at the outset. And I have no money."

De Batz made short work of that difficulty. He cried out on a note of protest: "Citizen-Representative! Can you conceive that a man of your shining merits should lack friends to advance you what capital may be necessary?"

Chabot looked at him, his glance a trifle unsteady.

"You mean that the Freys . . ."

"The Freys! I am not thinking of the Freys. I am thinking of myself. If you associate yourself with us, it is but proper that I should provide the necessary initial funds. You may draw on me, my friend. I am here to serve you."

The wavering gaze of the representative continued to consider the Baron.

"That would remove a difficulty," he admitted. "Well, well, we'll talk of this again after I have taken counsel with Junius Frey."

CHAPTER XXII

BRIBERY

"WILL you tell me," André-Louis begged de Batz, "who, in the name of Heaven, are these Freys, whom the unspeakable Chabot has dragged so abruptly upon the scene, and by whose opinions he sets such store?"

He sat once more under the limes, alone now with de Batz, at the table still littered with the remains of the banquet spread for the departed guests.

De Batz tapped his snuff-box and supplied the information.

"The brothers Frey were a pair of Austrian or Polish Jews, bankers by trade, who had come to establish themselves in Paris under a pretence of ardent republicanism, no doubt in the hope of enriching themselves out of the general disorder. It was a proof of courage. Their change of name is a part of their pretence. The rest: the honours and the millions sacrificed, the confidence of the Emperor, and the like, were just so many spurious trappings. They haunted the clubs, particularly the Jacobins, and also the Convention. They have known how to make friends among the members of the Convention, and Lebrun, the Minister for Foreign Affairs, was known to protect these scoundrels."

De Batz further informed him that with them lodged a fellow named Proly, who, to the Baron's knowledge, was a spy in the pay of Austria. This, at least, was definite enough for André-Louis. "That should enable us to absorb these Freys. It becomes necessary since they influence Chabot."

On the morrow he dragged the Baron back to Paris and the Rue de Ménars, despite the Baron's reluctance to return just yet.

Within two hours of their arrival, this reluctance seemed more than justified by a visit from the Municipal Burlandeux, who had evidently kept the house under observation.

The burly officer swept aside Biret-Tissot, who opened the door to him, announced truculently that he would be put off by no lies, and swaggered insolently into the Baron's presence. He did not even trouble to remove the great cocked hat that covered him.

"So, my cockerel, you've come back to your roost, eh? I've a notion that the president of the Section will be glad to see you, and will have a question or two to ask you."

De Batz contained himself almost with difficulty. "And the subject, if you please?"

The municipal laughed coarsely. "Oh, ho! You play the innocent. You have no suspicion, of course. You'll have no recollection of having been at the Temple some nights ago."

De Batz shook his head. "I have not."

"And you never heard of an attempt to rescue the woman Antoinette from her prison, I suppose?"

The Baron took time to answer, regarding him steadily the while. "Now I know you for an impostor. It has been established by the Committee of Public Safety that no such attempt was made, and certainly the president of your Section never sent you to me on any errand concerned with that."

"Ah! Very sure of yourself, are you not, Citizen Aristocrat? If you were to step round to the headquarters of the Section with me, we might persuade you that we are not so easily fooled, we other sansculottes."

"Unless you quit my premises immediately, you may find me stepping round to the Section on a very different errand, my friend. Come now. Be off! I've no time to waste on you or your kind."

"My kind!" The municipal's voice shrilled up in anger. "My kind! Why, you damned aristocrat, what kind is mine? I'll tell you, name of a name! It's the kind that sends your kind to the national barber. I know enough about you to bring your head into the basket. You can show off your airs and graces to Charlot when I've done with you."

The door opened behind him. André-Louis, attracted by that storming voice, stepped quietly into the room. The municipal wheeled sharply at the sound. André-Louis' face was solemn.

"That was an ill-omened name you mentioned, citizen. It is not well to speak so familiarly of the executioner of Paris. It is unlucky, my good Burlandeux."

"So it is. So it will be—for both of you, by God!"

"An idle oath. The Convention has abolished God. But

why must you persecute us, who have done you no harm, and might do you much good?"

"Good? You do me good! I should like to see the good that you can do me."

André-Louis preserved his gentleness. "Should you not account it good to receive a hundred louis?"

Insult was arrested on the sansculotte's coarse lips. They parted in astonishment. He stared a moment.

"A hundred louis!" Then he resumed with an increase of fury. "Ah, that! Now I understand! You want to bribe me. You think a true patriot is to be seduced by bribes. But not for two hundred louis would I be false to my sacred duty."

"Let us say three hundred, then."

Burlandeux stood paralysed.

André-Louis became insinuating. "Oh, and not as a bribe. We know how idle it is to seek to corrupt a true sansculotte such as yourself, Burlandeux. It is just a little gift, a little earnest of our appreciation of your friendship, a proof, indeed, of the republican honesty of our own sentiments, which should set all your doubts at rest."

"Fine words!" said Burlandeux hoarsely. "Fine words! But for what, then, do you pay me, name of . . .?"

"We do not pay you. Let me explain. The Citizen Batz and I are financiers, engaged in operations which you would hardly understand. Arrests and the like upon suspicions, however unfounded, are embarrassing to us. Whilst they cannot harm us further, since we are really good patriots, yet they destroy our credit and hamper us in several ways. To avoid interference it is proper that we should share with patriots of established character some portion of the profits we look to make. To you, Citizen Burlandeux, as I have said, we are prepared to entrust three hundred louis for distribution as you think fit. No doubt you will be able to do much good with it."

Burlandeux looked from one to the other of them. André-Louis smiled ingratiatingly. The Baron was impassive. He scarcely approved; yet he allowed André-Louis to have his way. The municipal did not reply immediately. His big chin sunk into his unclean neck-cloth, he considered rather than combated the temptation. He perceived that these aristocrats or foreign agents, or whatever they might be, could be turned into milk-cows for his profit. When he had drained these rascals, bled them white, it would still be time to do his duty by the nation and fling them to the headsman. Thus, with a conscience at ease, and with some profanity he assented.

De Batz, still reluctant, took at André-Louis' request a bundle of assignats from the drawer of a cabinet in that daintily-appointed room, and counted off the sum agreed.

Burlandeux's eyes gleamed. As he pocketed them he laughed.

"This is indeed a proof of patriotism, citizens. Count Burlandeux your friend. And the friendship of Burlandeux—name of God!—is a stout buckler in these uneasy days."

Not until he had gone did the Baron utter a word of remonstrance.

"What purpose is there in this waste?"

"Waste? You didn't give him good ones, did you?"

"Of course not. But even so! I don't distribute false assignats quite so freely. We shall never now be rid of that scoundrel."

"So he reckons?" André-Louis smiled. "Wait here until I return. I will not keep you long."

He sought his hat, and departed without further explanations. He walked briskly by way of the Feuillants and the Tuileries Gardens to the Pavillon de Flore. Here he was informed that the Committee of Public Safety was not sitting, but that the secretary of the committee was in his office. André-Louis desired to be conducted to him.

The Citizen Sénard, one of the most valuable agents in the pay of de Batz, was already acquainted with André-Louis.

A slight, fallow man, with a sharp face under a thatch of thick hair prematurely grey which at a little distance had the appearance of being powdered, he frowned darkly upon his visitor.

"Ah, morbleu! But this is infernally imprudent!" he muttered under his breath.

André-Louis smiled. "Do not be alarmed, Sénard." He laid his agent's card upon the table for the secretary's inspection.

"What's this?" Sénard inspected the card in astonishment. "Is it some of Roussel's handiwork?"

"Oh, come now. Are we so clumsy as to commit forgeries that could so easily be detected? You should know those signatures: Amar, Caillieux, Sevestre. Besides, your register will show that it was issued by this office."

Sénard scrutinized the card and returned it. His frown had deepened. "But, then . . . I don't understand."

"My dear Sénard, have you never before known a man to act in two capacities?" He stared straight and significantly at the secretary who was himself in the pay of both sides.

"I see. Which is to say, I am in the dark. In what capacity do you appear at present?"

"But as the agent of the committee, of course. I have a duty to perform. A denunciation to make. A municipal officer, attached to the Lepelletier Section, Burlandeux by name, is engaged in corrupt practices. I have allowed him to believe me to be the agent of some foreign power, and he has accepted from me a bribe to hold his tongue."

"This will require proof," said Sénard.

"It has been provided. Half an hour ago I paid this scoundrel three hundred louis in assignats. If your agents act quickly they may still find the money in his pocket. His station in life would not permit the honest possession of such a sum. Let him explain to the committee how he comes by it."

Slowly Sénard nodded. "Set the denunciation down in writing, citizen, and I will give instant orders."

An hour later the Municipal Burlandeux between two National Guards faced the president of his Section to explain his possession of three hundred louis. The wretched man, perceiving in how simple a gin he had been caught, raved and stormed, but said no word that did not further incriminate him. He listened to a moving address from the president upon civic virtue, the importance of purity in public functionaries, and the hideousness of venality which merited nothing less than death. Upon that he was marched off to Bicêtre, there to await his trial, with the assurance that the guillotine would follow. The bundle of assignats was forwarded to Sénard, and by the Committee of Public Safety returned to its agent André-Louis Moreau with a warm commendation of his skill in unmasking a scoundrel who abused the office with which the Nation had entrusted him.

"Do you still think that Burlandeux will further trouble us?" André-Louis asked De Batz.

De Batz, looking at him, shook his head. "There are times, André, when you almost frighten me."

"That is not my aim. It is for you to put me in the way of frightening others."

That evening they set about the business of frightening the brothers Frey.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE BROTHERS FREY

THAT frail beauty, Madame de Sainte-Amarande, and her still more beautiful daughter had not yet ceased in these days of Prairial of the Year 2 to do the honours of that famous gaming-house known as the Fifty. The place, if already beginning to decline from its former splendid exclusive character, was still the best patronized of all the public places within the precincts of the Palais Royal, and admission was still to be gained only by introduction.

Thither in quest of Proly, who was known to frequent it assiduously, went the Baron de Batz that evening accompanied by André-Louis. The Baron was well-known there, and the doors opened readily to him and to his companion.

They wandered through fairly well tenanted rooms, where ponderously ornate furnishings and decorations were beginning to show signs of wear. A few elegant, courtly men with powdered heads, who a couple of years ago would have been of the only type to be met there, were now outnumbered by the raffish pleasure-seekers whom the revolution with its doctrines of equality had made free of every public place and every house of entertainment. The women, almost without exception, were the feminine counterpart and natural companions of these interlopers.

De Batz studied the punters about a faro-table before passing into the farther room where roulette was being played and where the attendance was greater. There he espied the blonde, graceful, pale-complexioned Proly, an inveterate gamester, seated at play. They were in luck, for behind his chair stood Junius Frey, sturdy and swarthy, a man in the early thirties, dressed with truly republican simplicity.

De Batz pointed them out to his companion, and would have conducted him to them, but at that moment a moderately tall and very shapely girl in mauve and silver with heavy golden tresses dressed high, and the clearest of blue eyes, in turning away from the table came suddenly face to face with André-Louis. A frown was instantly effaced from between those fine brows. Amazement dawned on the comely face, and in a moment it was transfigured; the dainty lips parted to reveal her strong white teeth.

"Scaramouche!" she cried, and was upon him, and had kissed

him, there before all the world, in a reckless surrender to impulse.

"Columbine!" he answered her in an equal amazement. For here before him stood a companion of his old histrionic days, the Columbine of the Binet troupe which he had directed to fortune before bringing it to ultimate disaster.

A heavy figure loomed beside them. Delaunay's quiet voice addressed André-Louis.

"You already have the advantage of the Citoyenne Descoings' acquaintance?"

Four words of explanation served to melt the deputy's scowl and to reassure him that here was no enterprising rival for the favours of a woman for whose sake Delaunay was ready to sell his country and risk his head.

"And so," said André-Louis, "you are the famous, the fortunate Descoings!"

"The unfortunate Descoings," she answered him with a rueful smile. "I have just lost a hundred louis."

"You play too steeply," Delaunay admonished her.

"Perhaps. But, my friend, it is money I need, not reproofs. Lend me a hundred louis, Delaunay."

The round face seemed to grow rounder in blankness. The eyes were troubled under their black brows. "Faith! I don't possess them, little one."

"Fifty, then. I must make good my losses. You'll not deny me fifty."

"It breaks my heart, child," said Delaunay. Her frown terrified him. "My dear . . ."

It was a moment of crisis, as André-Louis perceived.

Softly he murmured: "Can I be of assistance?"

"If you can lend me fifty louis, Scaramouche . . ." she was beginning, when Delaunay elbowed him away from her, and followed him. Over his shoulder he begged of her: "A moment, little one! A moment!" Then to André-Louis, when he had thrust him beyond her hearing: "We are to operate together. That is settled. It is only the moment that has not yet arrived. Advance me a hundred louis out of the share that is ultimately to come to me, and you make me your friend for life."

"My dear Delaunay!" André-Louis' tone implied a protest of any doubt in the other's mind. Forth from his pocket he pulled a bundle of assignats, and thrust it into the deputy's big hand. "Here are three hundred. Repay me when you please."

Incredulously, effusively, Delaunay thanked him and went off, to rejoin and satisfy the Descoings.

André-Louis reflected that a packet of assignats which had already served that day as one man's probable passport to the guillotine was likely now to discharge the same office by another. With that grim reflection he sauntered after de Batz, who was already deep in conversation with Proly. The Baron had drawn the gamester away from the table and also away from his swarthy companion. The two were alone and a little apart when André-Louis came up with them. De Batz presented him. To Proly, who knew de Batz for a royalist agent, just as de Batz knew him for an Austrian spy, this was a sufficient introduction. A sort of freemasonry existing between them, Proly was quite frank on the subject of the Freys. But it added little to the Baron's previous knowledge. The republicanism of the brothers was entirely a pretence. They were in France only to satisfy their appetite for money. They played their patriotic part extremely well. They courted in particular the men of the Mountain, the men of the party standing to-day about Robespierre who undoubtedly, thought Proly, aimed at nothing less than a dictatorship. Not only Chabot, but Simon of Strasbourg and Bentabolles were entirely under the influence of the Freys, and Lebrun the minister, who owed them favours, also gave them his protection.

De Batz was disappointed in the information. Not so André-Louis.

"There is enough and to spare. It is established that they are hypocrites, and the conscience of a hypocrite is a sensitive thing, a ragged panoply that leaves him vulnerable."

By Proly the two conspirators were presented to the unsuspecting Junius. To de Batz he had little to say, but he remembered Moreau's name from the days of the Legislative Assembly, and in his guttural French effusively expressed his satisfaction at making the acquaintance of a man who deserved so well at the hands of all lovers of freedom. After that he talked fantastically of the glories of the revolution and the overthrow of despotism which had trampled the dignity of man under its monstrous feet.

They became such good friends that André-Louis did not hesitate to pay him a visit two days later at his handsome house in the Rue d'Anjou.

Junius Frey, swarthy, paunchy and oily, coarsely dressed in his affectations of sansculottism, opened wide metaphorical arms to this member of that great army of intellectuals who had been the pioneers in the great work of delivering France from the fetters of tyranny in which she had writhed. Thus at great length, in the best manner of the orators of the Jacobins, Junius Frey gave him welcome. He presented him to his brother Emmanuel, who was a

year or two younger, a cadaverous man with an overgrown look, a furtive manner and a high-pitched voice. They made an odd contrast. The elder brother so intensely virile, the younger almost emasculate. And there was also a sister, Léopoldine, a child of not more than sixteen, although displaying already the appearance of a full muliebrity, who so little resembled either of them that it was difficult to believe them of the same blood. She was small and shapely, of a lighter complexion than either of her brothers, with clear-cut features, gentle brown eyes, and a mass of brown hair swathed turbanwise about her head above the row of curls that rippled on her wide brow.

Having been presented and duly informed of the exalted civic virtues of the Citizen André-Louis Moreau, she was permitted to procure cake and wine for the visitor's refreshment, and thereafter encouraged to efface herself.

Junius desired to know if there was any way in which he could serve the Citizen Moreau. Emmanuel supplied a high-pitched echo.

"Why, since you offer it, my friends, I will take advantage of you."

He looked round the solidly appointed room in which they sat and noted here none of the Spartan republicanism that distinguished the dress and speech of his hosts.

"This machine," he said, "of which you do me the honour to regard me as one of the constructors, marches none too well of late."

"Alas!" Junius sighed profoundly. "The human factor! Can we hope for perfection where that is present?"

"If we are earnest and sincere we should seek to eliminate as far as possible the imperfections."

"A sacred duty," said Junius.

"A noble task," added Emmanuel, washing his enormous bony hands in the air.

"We who are not of the government," said André-Louis, "should employ our talents so as to influence in the right direction those who are."

"Assuredly. Oh, assuredly!" cried both as with one voice.

"François Chabot is your friend. You will, I know, have given him the advantage of your wide, almost cosmopolitan, vision. You will have employed your influence to whet him like a knife for the incisive work that still lies before all right-minded patriots."

"How well you express it," purred Junius.

"How perfectly!" cried Emmanuel.

"At the same time," André-Louis continued in a tolerant tone, "you have turned him to your own profitable account."

Junius was startled out of his oily complacency. "How so?"

"Oh, but who shall blame you? Money in such noble hands as yours is held in trust for mankind. You would never employ it in any but worthy aims. Such men as you make it your task to remove the bandage from the eyes of Fortune. You render her discerning in the distribution of her favours, acting in this as her deputy. It is indeed a sacred charge. You render it the nobler by the risks you incur, the risks of being misunderstood, misrepresented. But what are these risks to men of your patriotic heroism?"

The brothers' eyes were intently upon him. In those of Junius anger began to smoulder. Emmanuel's reflected only fear. Although André-Louis paused, they said nothing. They waited for him to come further out into the open to display his aims more clearly, before they countered. So André-Louis, smiling amiably, resumed.

"Now I, my friends, am actuated by very similar intentions. Like yourselves I have perceived that here all is not as well as it should be, not as well as we who helped to make this revolution could desire. But we who originally made are the ones who can mend, who can guide. Together with the Citizen de Batz, who is associated with me, I have made certain proposals to the Representative Chabot, which he is now considering. The result of these would be to make for the aggrandisement of the sacred cause of Liberty. But the esteem in which you, my friends, are held by the Citizen Chabot is as high as it is no doubt deserved. He permits himself to be guided by you, in which he is heartily to be applauded. He would make no decision in the matter we set before him until he has taken counsel with you. Perhaps he has already done so?"

Junius, shrewd enough to perceive already whither his visitor was travelling, and relieved that it was no worse, spoke at last to answer him.

"He has not."

"Then I come in good time. Aware as you are of my republican virtues, your own will hardly suffer you to advise him other than to associate himself with me in these little enterprises which de Batz and I have in view."

He had done. He sat back in his chair, and waited. Emmanuel was shifting nervously, looking from his brother to their visitor, until Junius, who had sat stolidly throughout, at last delivered himself.

"That my dear Citizen Moreau, must depend upon the nature of these enterprises when the Citizen Chabot reveals them to me. Our duty to the cause——"

He was interrupted. André-Louis raised a hand in protest. "My dear Frey! Could I suggest any course from which it would be your duty to turn him? Can you impute such a thing as that to me, whose patriotism I venture to say stands as high as your own, and rests, if you will suffer the comparison, upon better evidence in our respective past actions?" He did not give the financier time to answer, but went on: "Situating as we are, actuated as we are by the same sentiments of an unquestionable purity, you must see, citizen, as I see, that united we can be of great assistance to each other." Very slyly he added. "Almost it might be said of us that united we stand severed we fall."

If the threat was delicately veiled, it was none the less instantly apparent to Junius.

He laughed uncomfortably. "Really, Citizen Moreau! Really! What you desire me to understand is that I shall find co-operation with you valuable opposition to you dangerous."

André-Louis smiled. "It does happen that I can pull strings in both directions."

"In short, you are threatening me I think."

"Threatening? My dear Citizen Frey! What a word to use!"

"Would it not be better to be plain?" Junius was severe. Emmanuel sat timorously observant and effaced.

"That is what I have endeavoured. One may be plain without employing terms of an unnecessary harshness."

"You appear, Citizen Moreau to be a master of that art."

"Among several others," said André-Louis airily. He finished his wine, dusted some crumbs of cake from his neckcloth, and got up. "I am relieved to have been so readily understood."

The Citizen Junius rose in his turn; his brother followed his example.

"You do not trouble," said the elder Frey "to seek my, answer."

"Your answer? But your answer to what? I have asked no question, citizen. I have merely indicated a situation."

"And you are not even curious to know how I shall act in it?"

"I place my trust entirely in your intelligence," said the affable André-Louis and took his leave with many expressions

of the satisfaction it had afforded him to become acquainted with two such exemplary patriots as the brothers Frey.

"That's a damned impudent fellow " said Junius to Emmanuel when André-Louis had gone.

"In these days," said Emmanuel, "only those who are safe venture to be impudent. And those who are safe are always dangerous. I think we should be careful with the Citizen Moreau. What shall you do, Junius?"

"Ah! What?" wondered Junius.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE GENIUS OF D'ENTRAGUES

ANDRÉ-LOUIS' heart would never have been as light as it was whilst he pursued his preparations for the blasting of republican reputations as an important preliminary to the blasting of the Republic itself and the restoration of the House of Bourbon if he could have guessed how the events at Hamm were conspiring towards the blasting of his own future.

We have seen the Count of Provence persuaded that it was his duty to bear what consolation he could to Mademoiselle de Kercadiou for the bereavement which the service of himself and his house had brought to her; and we have seen the diligent and far-sighted Count d'Entragues confirming Monsieur in that persuasion.

It was a duty to which Monsieur devoted himself assiduously; and his assiduity increased in a measure as the necessity for it mercifully diminished.

Once the shock had spent itself and the realization of her loss had fully overtaken her, Mademoiselle de Kercadiou braced herself to face life again as bravely as she might. The abiding wound to her spirit betrayed itself only in a wistfulness that served to heighten the appeal of her delicate loveliness and the more violently to stir those longings secretly harboured by the Regent. His attendance upon her became soon a daily habit. Daily he would escape from his labours of correspondence so

that he might wait upon Mademoiselle de Kercadiou, leaving his affairs more and more to d'Avaray and d'Entraques, and doing little besides holding the balance between the continual disagreements of these two. Almost daily now, when the weather was fine, the inhabitants of Hamm would meet the portly, strutting Regent of France and the slender golden-headed Mademoiselle de Kercadiou walking abroad alone like any bourgeois couple.

Just as d'Entraques' confidence in the issue increased, so did d'Avaray's misgivings grow heavier. His uneasiness on the score of his friend Madame de Balbi drove him to write strongly to her in Brussels where she was installed. But the Countess, a child of pleasure who had found a pretext to depart from Turin because of the dullness of the court there, was not moved to quit the gaieties of Brussels for the monastic severity and penury of life at Hamm. Besides, her confidence in herself would not admit the uneasiness for which d'Avaray's letters so insistently stressed the reason. Let Monsieur by all means beguile the tedium of existence at Hamm by amusing himself with the insipidities of the Lord of Gavrilac's niece. Madame de Balbi would know how to resume her empire when life at the Regent's side demanded fewer sacrifices than those imposed by his Westphalian environment. She was not quite so explicit as this in her letters. But d'Avaray read the plain truth more and more clearly between the lines, and he was distressed. He did not share her opinion that Mademoiselle de Kercadiou was insipid, and it was quite evident to him that Monsieur was very far from sharing it. There were signs actually that Monsieur was discussing affairs of State with the Lord of Gavrilac's little niece, and than this nothing could have afforded a graver index of the depth of his feelings for her.

It was perhaps less significant than d'Avaray supposed. It was merely a measure of subtle flattery, which the Regent, rendered crafty by the unusual difficulties of the approach, was employing so as to avoid alarming Mademoiselle de Kercadiou.

Just as everything was flowing precisely as d'Entraques could wish, the courier from Pomelles, who had left Paris within some hours of Langt ac's departure, arrived at Hamm a fortnight behind time, having been delayed on the way by a fall from his horse which had left him suffering from concussion. Fortunately for him he was across the frontier when this happened, and so he remained in friendly hands, his papers untouched, until he was in case to resume his journey.

These papers delivered to Monsieur d'Entraques gave this subtle gentleman a bad quarter of an hour. There was the news

in the letter from Pomelles of the survival of this Moreau, whom they had so confidently been accounting dead, and, what was worse, there was the letter from this cursed Moreau himself to Mademoiselle de Kercadiou. But d'Entragues rang for a servant, and into his hands delivered the newly arrived and dusty courier.

"You will be weary, monsieur," he said to the latter. "You will find a room at your disposal above-stairs. You are at liberty to rest. What food you require will be sent to you there. I must ask you in the interests of State not to leave that room or hold conversation of any kind with any person until I send for you again."

Monsieur at that very moment was at one of his daily promenades with Mademoiselle. Monsieur de Kercadiou was at work in a neighbouring chamber in the *châlet*. D'Entragues sat frowning, considering the sealed letter from Moreau, which had been enclosed in the package from his Paris agent. This was a damned inconvenient resurrection. He turned the letter over; he studied the seal; he was moved to break it, and see what the fellow found to say to his lady; but he resisted the temptation. He would wait until Monsieur returned. For whatever he did, and he began to have a shrewd suspicion of what it would be, he must have Monsieur's authority.

Meanwhile Monsieur, with little suspicion indeed of the disagreeable surprise awaiting him at home, was chatting amiably, insinuatingly, with the gentle lady, who, pitying his loneliness and his misfortunes, was so ready to afford him the companionship he sought with such condescending deference.

"You do not know, child," he was saying in that thick, purring voice of his, "what strength and comfort I gather from our discussions; how they help me in my difficulties."

It was not by any means the first time that he had used some such words during the last of the three weeks that were sped since Langéac's return with his sinister tidings.

They chanced to be walking by the Lippe. It was the first time they had gone that way, by the very path which she and André-Louis had trodden in February last, when the countryside had lain white in the grip of frost. Now all was vernal green, the meadows jewelled with flowers, the shrunken river flowing cool and clear in the shade of willows heavy with feathery leaf.

Mademoiselle de Kercadiou, in a long coat of dark green with wide lapels and a broad black hat to render her whiteness the more startling, stepped daintily beside the sluggish portly prince whose height was shorter than her own by an inch or so.

"These talks have helped me, too," she said thoughtfully.

He checked, and turned to her, leaning upon his gold-headed cane. They were quite alone here in the meadows by the river, within sight of that very stile where André-Louis and she had paused on that day of their last week together. High overhead, invisible in the blue, a lark was pouring out its liquid song.

"If I could believe that, my dear child!"

Wistfully she smiled upon the sudden gravity of his florid countenance.

"Is it difficult to believe? In your preoccupations, monseigneur, I have found some refuge from my own."

"Do you conceive the joy with which I hear you say it? It makes me of some account, of some use in this world where nowadays there seems to be no place for me or need of me."

"You exaggerate, monseigneur, to express the kindness you have always shown me."

"Kindness? How inadequately that describes my feelings, Aline. I have studied in my mind how I might serve you. Hence the inexpressible satisfaction borne me by what you have now said. If it could but be given to me to comfort you, to bring you abiding consolation, then I should be the proudest, the happiest of men."

"You should be that, monseigneur, who are the noblest." Her gentle eyes considered him almost in wonder. He winced a little under that clear regard. The colour deepened in his cheeks.

"I had not deserved," she added, "so great a condescension."

"What have you not deserved of me, Aline?" He took her arm in the grip of his plump white fingers. "What is there that you may not command of me? Of my love for you?"

Watching her keenly with his full eyes, that one handsome feature of his otherwise dull face, he read in her troubled glance that he had been premature. This delicious fruit had not yet ripened under the covert ardour of his cautious wooing. She was timid as a gazelle, and he scared her by the clumsiness of his approach. He perceived the necessity to restore at once her confidence. Gently, but resolutely, she was disengaging her arm from his grip, a slight contact, yet one which did not make it easier for him now to retreat. But retreat he did in the best order he could summon. Looking deep into her eyes, he smiled very gently.

"You suspect perhaps that I but indulge an idle gallantry. My dear! My affection for you is very real, very deep and very sincere, as it was for your Uncle Etienne whose memory I shall ever cherish."

This, of course, gave a new meaning to his declaration, and in effacing the suspicion she had conceived made her almost ashamed of it. Hence a reaction in his favour which brought a flush to her cheeks and made her falter in her reply.

"Monseigneur, you do me a great honour; too great an honour."

"No honour could be too great for you. I am but a prince by birth, whilst you are a princess by nature: noble in your soul with a nobility loftier than any that is of human conferring."

"Monseigneur, you leave me confused."

"Your modesty does that. You have never realized yourself. That is the way of rare natures such as yours. It is only the worthless who harbour notions of their worth."

She battled feebly against this tide of flattery. "Monseigneur, your own nobility lends a kindness to your vision. There is little worth in me."

"You shall not decry yourself. With me it is idle. I have too much evidence of your goodness. Who but a saint would so compassionate my loneliness as to give so freely of herself to mitigate it?"

"What are you saying, monseigneur!"

"Is it less than the truth? Am I not lonely? Lonely and unfortunate, almost friendless nowadays, reduced to poverty, living in sordidness?" Thus he stirred her sympathy which was ever at the call of those in need of it, her sweet womanly instinct to solace the afflicted. "It is in such times as these that we know our true friends. In this hour I can count my own upon the fingers of one hand. I live here upon grudging charity, at once a prince and a pauper, forsaken by all but a very faithful few. Can I do less than repay in love the disinterested devotion which I can scarcely contemplate without tears?"

They were retracing now their steps, moving slowly along the river's brink, Aline deeply stirred by his lament and flattered to be the recipient of his princely confidences, to have him lay bare to her his secret and humiliating thoughts. She was conscious, too, that these confidences were forging a stronger link between them. As they moved, he continued to talk, passing to still deeper intimacies.

"A prince's is never an enviable estate, even in the happiest times. He is courted not for himself but for that which his favour can bestow. He is ever in danger of mistaking sycophancy for love; and if that happens which tests the relations he has formed, if there comes a time when he must depend upon the merits of his own self rather than upon the glitter of his rank,

bitterness is commonly his portion. How many of those whom I trusted most, whose affection I deemed most sincere, stand by me to-day? There was one of whom I believed that she would have remained at my side when all others had forsaken me. Where is she now? Her affection for me when put to the test is not strong enough to envisage poverty."

She knew that he alluded to Madame de Balbi, and at the pathos in his voice her pity for him deepened.

"Is it not possible, monseigneur, that, aware of your straitened circumstances, your friends hesitate to encroach upon them?"

"How charitable you are! How everything you say reveals a fresh beauty of your soul! I have sought to flatter my vanity by just such a conclusion. But the evidences deny it." He sighed ponderously. Then his liquid eyes sought her countenance and he smiled sadly into it. "Ah, but there are consolations. Your friendship, my dear Aline, is the greatest of them. I hope that I am not destined to lose it with the rest."

Her eyes were misty. "Since you value this poor friendship of mine, monseigneur, you may be sure that it will never fail you."

"My dear!" he said, and paused to take her hand, and bear it to his lips.

Thus he effected in good order his retreat from a position towards which he had prematurely advanced. He stood once more upon the solid ground of friendship thence later, to direct an attack for which experience told him that the opportunity would not now be indefinitely postponed. And in the meantime her own sympathy should be employed to undermine her defences.

But back at the *châlet* that evening he was to be informed by the waiting d'Entragues of that other obstacle which he had been accounting so definitely surmounted.

"He lives!" Monsieur had cried, and in that cry, in its pitch, and the suddenly disordered appearance of him, he had completely betrayed himself to his astute minister.

"Not only does he live; but he is well and active."

"My God!" said the Regent, and sat down heavily, taking his head in his hands. There was a pause.

"I have a letter from him for Mademoiselle de Kercadiou," d'Entragues softly informed him. Monsieur said nothing. He sat on, like a man stunned. D'Entragues waited in silence, watching him, the ghost of a smile at the corners of his tight mouth. At last: "Does your highness desire it to be delivered?" he asked,

Such was his tone that at last the Regent lowered his hands, and looked at him. The round face was startled, almost scared.

"Delivered?" he asked hoarsely. "But what else, d'Entragues? What else?"

D'Entragues drew a long breath audibly, like a sigh. "I have been thinking, monseigneur."

"You have been thinking? And then?"

The letter was in d'Entragues' hands, poised by its edges between his forefingers. He rotated it slowly as he spoke. "It seems almost a refinement of cruelty." He paused there, and then, in answer to the question in Monsieur's stare, he went on: "This rash young man and that fanfarron de Batz continue in reactionary activities, likely to result in nothing but the fall of their own heads under the guillotine."

"What then? What is in your mind?"

D'Entragues raised his brows as if deprecating the sluggishness of his master's wits. "This gentle young lady has already suffered her bereavement. She has endured her agony. She has recovered from it. Time has begun to heal the wound. Is her anguish to be suffered all over again at some time in the near future, when that which in this case was a misapprehension of that idiot Langéac shall come to be the actual fact?"

Monsieur considered. His breathing was slightly laboured.

"I see," he said. "Yes. But if, after all, Moreau should survive all these perils he is facing?"

"That is so improbable as not to be worth taking into account. He has escaped this time by a miracle. Such miracles do not happen twice in a man's life. And even if it did . . ." He broke off, ruminating.

"Yes, yes," the Regent rapped at him. "What then? What then? That is what I want to know. What then?"

"Even then no harm would have been done, and perhaps some good. It is clear to all that this is a mésalliance for Mademoiselle de Kercadiou. She is deserving of something far better than this nameless fellow, this bastard of God knows whom. If in the persuasion that he is dead she puts him from her mind, as she is doing already, and if before he comes to life again—if he ever should, which is so very unlikely—her affections, liberated from his thrall, shall have fixed themselves elsewhere, upon someone worthier, would not that be something to the good?"

The Regent was continuing to stare at him. "That letter?" he said at last.

D'Entragues shrugged. "Need any know that it ever arrived? It is a miracle that it did. The fellow who brought it

suffered a concussion that delayed him three weeks upon the road. He might easily have suffered death."

"But, my God! I know of its existence."

"Could your highness blame yourself for silence where it may do so much good, and when speech might be the cause of such ultimate suffering to a lady who deserves well?"

The tortured prince took his head in his hands again. At long last he spoke without looking up.

"I give you no orders, d'Entraques. I desire to know nothing more of this. You will act entirely upon your own discretion."

The smile which hitherto had been a ghost took definite shape upon the lips of Monsieur d'Entraques. He bowed to the averted huddled figure of his prince.

"Perfectly, monseigneur," he said.

CHAPTER XXV

THE INTERDICT

LIFE in Paris was becoming uncomfortable. The results of government by Utopian ideals began to make themselves felt. In the words of Saint-Just, "misery had given birth to the Revolution, and misery might destroy it". The immediate cause lay in the fact that, again to quote the fidus Achates of Robespierre, "the multitude which had recently been living upon the superfluities of luxury and by the vices of another class", found itself without means of subsistence.

In less revolutionary language this means that the vast mass of the people which found employment so long as there was a wealthy nobility to employ it, was now, under the beneficent rule of equality, unemployed and faced with destitution. Not only were these unfortunates without the means to purchase food, but food itself was becoming difficult to purchase. The farmers were becoming increasingly reluctant to market their produce, in exchange for paper money which was daily depreciating in value.

For this depreciation, partly resulting from the flood of

assignats in which the country was submerged, the Convention denounced the forgers who were at work. The Convention beheld in them the agents of the foreign despots who sought by these means to push the Nation into bankruptcy. This was, of course, a gross exaggeration; it possessed nevertheless some slight basis of truth. We do know of the activities of that printing-press at Charonne, and of the reckless prodigality with which de Batz was putting in circulation the beautiful paper money manufactured there by the extraordinarily skilful Balthazar Roussel. De Batz served two purposes at once: directly, he corrupted by means of this inexhaustible wealth those members of the government whom he found corruptible: indirectly, he increased the flood of forgeries that was so seriously embarrassing the Convention and diluting the shrunken resources of the Nation.

Saint-Just had a crack-brained notion of relieving matters by using grain as currency. Thus he felt that the agriculturists might be induced to part with it in exchange for other substances. But agriculturists, being by the very nature of their activities self-supporting, the scheme, otherwise impracticable, held little promise of success and was never put into execution. Industry and manufacture languished. Conscription was absorbing some seven hundred and fifty thousand men into its fourteen armies. But apart from this there was little employment to be found. The tanneries were idle, iron and wool were almost as scarce as bread. What little was produced barely sufficed for home consumption, so that nothing was left for export, and consequently the foreign exchanges rose steadily against France.

To the physical depression arising out of this came in the early days of that July of 1793, *style esclave*, Messidor of the Year 2 by the calendar of Liberty One and Indivisible, a moral depression resulting from the disasters to French arms, despite the unparalleled masses which conscription had enrolled.

And when on the anniversary that year of the fall of the Bastille came the assassination of the popular idol Marat by a young woman concerned to avenge the unfortunate Girondins, Paris went mad with rage.

Charlotte Corday was guillotined in a red shirt—the Convention decreed Panthéon honours to the murdered patriot, and never was there such a funeral as the torchlight procession in which his remains were borne to their tomb.

François Chabot, discerning parallels between Marat's position and his own, thundered in the Convention denunciations which reflected his own fear of assassination.

But the Convention had other distractions. At the moment Condée was occupied by the Austrians, and then in Thermidor Valenciennes suffered the same fate and Kléber capitulated at Mainz. The Vendée was in flagrant insurrection, and in the south there were mutterings of a royalist storm.

A cause for all these disasters, and for the menace of worse that seemed to overhang the land, had to be discovered by the Utopians who had endowed France and who hoped to endow the world with the glorious rule of Universal Brotherhood. It was discovered in the machinations of aristocrats at home and of Pitt and Coburg abroad. Against Pitt and Coburg the Convention could only inveigh. But against her home conspirators she could take action. And to this end was passed the Law of Suspects which was to overwhelm the new Revolutionary Tribunal with work and bring the guillotine into daily function.

Thus the Reign of Terror was established. Danton, newly-married, having been active in establishing it, went off to his lands at Arcis-sur-Aube, there to devote himself to agriculture and uxoriousness. Robespierre became more than ever the focus of popular hope and popular idolatry, with Saint-Just at his side to inspire him, and his little group of supporters to ensure that his will should be paramount. Already there were rumours that he aimed at a dictatorship. Saint-Just had boldly declared that a dictator was a necessity to a country in the circumstances in which France found herself, without however explaining how this could be reconciled with the purity of views which beheld tyranny in all individual authority.

For François Chabot, that other stout henchman of the Incorruptible Maximilien, these continued to be busy days. The Law of Suspects gave a free rein to his passion for denunciation, and almost daily now his capucinades were to be heard from the tribune of the Convention.

He would wade, he announced, through mud and blood in the service of the people. He would tear out his heart and give it to be eaten by the irresolute in republicanism, that thus they might assimilate the pure patriotism by which it was inspired.

Daily now the bread queues increased at the bakers; daily the populace, its passions whetted by famine, grew more blood-thirsty; daily the tumbrils, with their escorts of National Guards and rolling drums, rumbled down the Rue Saint Honoré to the Place de la Revolution. Nevertheless the curtain still rose punctually every evening at the Opera, there was an undiminished attendance at the Fifty and other gaming-houses in the Palais Egalité—heretofore Palais Royal—and elsewhere, and life in the

main pursued a normal course on this swiftly thinning crust of a volcano.

De Batz watched, organized and waited. His work lay in Paris, and in Paris he would remain whatever might be happening elsewhere. The Marquis de la Guiche, that most enterprising and daring of his associates, who went by the name of Sevignon, would have lured him away to join the insurrectionaries in the South. The Marquis, himself a soldier, reminded de Batz that he was a soldier, too, and pointed out that in the South a soldier's work awaited him. But de Batz would not move, such was his faith in the schemes of André-Louis, and in the end La Guiche departed alone to carry his sword where there was employment for it. The Baron did not oppose his departure. But he regretted it deeply, for there was no man more whole-heartedly devoted to the restoration of the monarchy than this utterly fearless, downright Marquis de la Guiche, who had been the only one to stand by him in that attempt to rescue the King.

He overcame, however, his regrets and remained at the post he had allotted himself. Here all was going as it should. At the present pace the revolution could not last much longer. Soon now this unfortunate populace must be brought to realize that its sufferings were the result of the incompetence of its rulers and of the chaos which had been born of their idealism. If, without awaiting this, it could be made to discover that the elected were corrupt and dishonest, and it could assign to their corruption, and not merely to incompetence, the hunger which it was made to endure, then a storm should arise that must sweep away for ever those windy rhetoricians. This had been the thought of André-Louis. The soundness of its foundation was being confirmed by the march of events observed at close quarters. Meanwhile the captivity of the Queen and her family continued. A month and more had passed since the attempt to rescue her, and nothing further had been heard of the negotiations with Vienna for the exchange of prisoners. De Batz began to be uneasy. Reasonably he suspected that the negotiations had aborted. The Queen's salvation must depend now upon the speedy exploding of the revolution. Therefore he spurred on André-Louis in the delicate task to which his confederate had set his hand.

André-Louis required no spurring. The task itself absorbed him. He approached it like a chess-player carefully studying the sequence of moves by which the end was to be reached.

François Chabot was his immediate object, to be gained by the brothers Frey, mere pawns to be taken or not in passing as

the developments should indicate. And the Freys were making things easy for him. His skilfully masked approach of defences, which the brothers knew in their consciences to be extremely vulnerable, had not failed of its intimidation. Junius, having considered, had discovered that their security lay in welcoming an association which they dared not take the risk of refusing. He had been helped to his decision by a hint from Proly that de Batz was in alliance with Moreau, and that de Batz wielded a wide and mysterious influence, a power which it was not prudent to provoke.

So the Freys opened their doors to the Baron and his friend, and had no immediate cause to regret it. On the contrary, the Baron, disposing of very considerable sums, showed himself from the outset able and willing to co-operate with the Freys in any of the financial ventures which engaged them and for which funds were necessary. Soon, indeed, the brothers came to congratulate themselves upon an association which at first had been forced upon them against their inclinations. The Baron displayed a shrewdness in finance which commended him increasingly to the respect and even friendship of the Freys, and which resulted in some transaction of considerable profit to them both.

André-Louis, too, being associated with the Baron, was by now on intimate terms with these Jewish bankers, a constant visitor at their substantial house in the Rue d'Anjou and at their well-furnished table, which had first rendered apparent to the starveling Chabot the advantages of accepting the friendship of these very zealous apostles of liberty, equality, and fraternity. The quiet, comely little Léopoldine never failed to make him welcome to dinner at her brothers' house and made no secret of the fact that she found a pleasure in his company. Her gentle brown eyes would soften as they watched him; her ears were attentive to all that he said, and her lips ready to smile at any sally of his. Thus very soon he was entirely at home with the Freys. They made him feel—as they had made Chabot feel—almost one of the family.

One evening after he and de Batz had dined at the Rue d'Anjou, and whilst they were still at table Chabot being of the party, Junius expounded to them a scheme in which he believed that millions could be made.

He and his brother were fitting out at Marseilles a corsair fleet to operate in the Mediterranean raiding not only the ships of enemy powers but also those ports on the Spanish and Italian coast which could easily be surprised

Junius coloured the undertaking so speciously as to make it appear of outstanding national importance a patriotic enterprise of advantage to the Republic since it harrassed her enemies. André-Louis appeared to be profoundly impressed. He praised the project in high terms for both its financial and patriotic soundness, that de Batz at once offered a contribution of a hundred thousand livres.

Junius smiled approval upon him 'You are quick to judge opportunity, my friend.'

Chabot was looking at him with round eyes. 'You have the advantage of being wealthy' he said with a sigh of envy.

'If you would enjoy the same advantage this is your opportunity, Citizen-Representative.'

'I?' Chabot smiled sourly 'I have not the necessary means to acquire a share. My labours have all been in the service of humanity. They bring no pecuniary reward.'

'Think of the treasure you might have amassed in Heaven if the Republic had not abolished it,' said André-Louis.

'My friend, you are flippant,' the representative reproved him. 'You gibe upon sacred subjects. It is not worthy'

'Do you still regard Heaven as a sacred subject?'

'I so regard the Republic,' Chabot thundered 'You permit yourself to jest about it. A sacrilege.'

De Batz intervened to place his purse at the disposal of the representative, so that he might acquire a share in this venture. Chabot, however, would not be tempted. If the business went awry, as well it might, for the risks connected with it were not to be denied, he would be without means to repay. He would be left in debt, and that was a dangerous situation for a Representative of the People. The Baron did not pursue the matter. He returned instead to the subject of his own investment, settling the details.

On their way home, through deserted streets at a late hour of that summer night, André-Louis approved him

'You were quick to take the hint, Jean.'

'Even although I did not perceive your aim My trust in you becomes almost child-like, André.'

'My aim is twofold. To seduce Chabot by showing him how easily and safely he may grow rich by trusting us, and so to display our powers to the Freys that they will not venture to oppose us whatever we demand. You shall see some pretty happenings shortly.'

But the month was out before André-Louis made any further move. He concerned himself meanwhile jointly with de Batz,

in some transactions in émigré property by which Delaunay and Julien were allowed to profit modestly, so as to encourage them.

Then one August morning he went off alone to the Tuileries. Awaiting the end of the morning session, he paced the hall mingling with the incredibly assorted attendance attracted by different motives to this vestibule of government. The preponderance was of rough men of the people, uncouth, ill-kempt, loud of voice and foul of utterance, some of them red-capped, all making great parade of revolutionary colours. As a leaven there were amongst them a few exquisites with powdered heads and striped coats, and a goodly proportion of men of the lawyer class in sober, well-cut raiment wearing their hair in clubs, with here and there the blue and white of an officer or the blue and red of a National Guardsman ; and there were some women present, too, for the most part coarse slatterns from the markets who took an interest in politics, bare of arms and almost bare of bosom, the tricolour cockade in their mob-caps. All intermingled and rubbed shoulders on terms of the equality dictated by the revolutionary rule.

Sitting apart on one of the benches ranged against a wall, André-Louis watched the scene with interest whilst he waited, himself scarcely observed. Ever and anon when a representative or other person of consequence arrived or departed, the thin crowd would range itself aside to give him passage, its members saluting him as he passed, some respectfully but most of them familiarly.

Many of these were known to André-Louis. There was Chabot, short, sturdy and ill-clad, with a red cap on his brown curls, undisputedly the greatest man with the populace now that Marat was dead. Pleasantries, at once obscene and affectionate, hailed him as he strutted through the crowd, and were returned by him in kind. In contrast, there was a young man of striking beauty of face and figure, dressed with conspicuous elegance, with whom none dared take such liberties. He was deferentially greeted as he passed, and he acknowledged the greetings with a casual haughtiness which no aristocrat of the old régime could have exceeded. This was the terrible Chevalier de Saint-Just, a gentleman by birth, a rogue by nature, who had lent the fire of his eloquence and personality to hoist Robespierre to the first place in the State.

There was another, an older man, also of a good presence and careful attire, languid of air and affected of manner, in whom André-Louis recognized the dramatist and legislator Fabre, who

had assumed the poetical name of d'Eglantine and who had attached himself to the tribune Danton.

At last among those issuing from the Convention he beheld the man he awaited, and rose to intercept him.

"A word with you on a matter of national importance, Delaunay."

The representative used him with the deference due to the man by whom we hope to profit. They extricated themselves from the throng, and sought the bench which André-Louis had lately occupied.

"Things move slowly, Delaunay."

"You don't reproach me with it, I hope," the representative grumbled.

"We will never quicken them, never come to big operations until Chabot's timidity is conquered."

"Agreed. But then?"

"This. The Freys, who control him, have sunk a fortune in a fleet of corsairs." He supplied some details. "An interdict upon that fleet would ruin them."

Delaunay was startled. "Do you want to ruin them?"

"Oh no. Merely to temper them. Merely to bend them to the proper shape for our ends."

André-Louis talked for some time, and evidently to some purpose; for three days later desolation descended upon that house in the Rue d'Anjou. From the tribune of the Convention the Deputy Delaunay had denounced the corsairs as robbers. "The Republic cannot sanction brigands by sea or land!" That had been his text. Upon this he had preached a sermon of Republican virtue and probity, at the end of which he had demanded an interdict against the corsair fleet. This had been voted by a Convention which had little interest in the matter.

De Batz and André-Louis sought the Freys. De Batz wore an air of consternation. "My friends, this is ruin for me!" In consternation he was answered that it was ruin for them no less.

Emmanuel was in tears, whilst Junius so far forgot himself in his rage as to inveigh against Chabot.

"That man has come here to guzzle at my table daily for the past three months, and now when he might have stood my friend, when by a word in time he might have averted this disaster, he keeps silent and leaves us to our fate. That is a friend for you! Ah, name of God!"

"You should have made him a partner in the venture," said de Batz. "I attempted it; but you did not support me."

"At least," said André-Louis, "make use of him in this extremity. If you don't, it is ruin. You have a responsibility towards de Batz, my friend. You will forgive my mentioning it."

"A responsibility! Oh, my God! He was a free agent. You knew what you were doing. I laid all my cards on the table. You saw precisely what was involved. Enough that we should be ruined in ourselves without being charged with responsibility for the ruin of others."

"And it won't help. What matters is to have things corrected, to have this ban lifted. Get Chabot here. Invite him to dinner. Amongst us we must constrain him."

Junius Frey obeyed; but he was not sanguine. He regarded an appeal to Chabot as a forlorn hope, and Chabot justified him of this when that same evening across the dinner table it was proposed to him that he should stand their friend and procure the repeal of the interdict.

"If I were to do as you require how should I ever justify myself before the tribunal of my conscience?"

Before the condemnation in his glance the long, bony Emmanuel seemed to wilt and even the sturdy Junius grew uncomfortable.

Giving no one time to answer him, Chabot launched himself upon an oration, a magnificent capucinade, some of the best sentiments of which were borrowed from the speech in which Delaunay had demanded the troublesome decree, but the terms of which were luridly Chabot's own. He inveighed fiercely against all dishonesty and speculation. He dwelt at length upon the corrupting power of gold which he described as the drag upon the wheels of progress towards that universal brotherhood which was to transform the earth into the likeness of a celestial abode.

"I remind you again," André-Louis cut in dryly, "that the Republic has abolished Heaven."

Thrown out of his rhetorical stride, Chabot glared annoyance.

"I speak in images," he announced.

"You should select them more in accordance with the creed of reason," André-Louis reproved him. "Otherwise you are in danger of being suspected of cant, a disease of which you are certainly a victim."

To Chabot this was almost paralysing.

"A victim of cant? I?" He could hardly speak.

"Your ardour misleads you. Your virtuous passion sweeps you headlong down false tracks. Listen to me a moment.

Citizen-Representative. In this imperfect world it is not often that good may be done without some harm resulting. In every projected action a wise statesman must consider which is to predominate. These corsairs are robbers. Admitted. To rob is a crime, and a pure republicanism cannot condone crime. Again admitted. But who is robbed? The enemies of France. For whose profit? That of the French Republic. And that which profits the Nation increases her strength and enables her the better to defeat her enemies at home and abroad. Thus there is a little personal harm to the end that there may be a great national good. This is a phase you have not considered. Mankind is not to be served by narrow views, Citizen-Representative. It is necessary to survey the whole field at once. If I steal the weapons from an assassin I commit a theft, which is a civic offence. But am I merely a robber, or am I a benefactor of mankind?"

There was loud, excited approval from the Freys and from de Batz. Little Léopoldine, who was at table with them, considered with glowing eyes the keen, pale face of the speaker. Chabot sat mute, bludgeoned by an argument which fundamentally was sound.

But when, taking advantage of this, de Batz renewed the appeal to him that he should make himself the champion of the corsairs and procure the repeal of the interdict, the conventional bestirred himself to resist. He waved a plump, ill-shaped and unclean hand.

"Ah that, no! Shall I make myself the advocate of robbers? What will be thought of me?"

"So long as you can answer before the tribunal of your conscience, does it matter what will be thought of you elsewhere?" asked André-Louis.

Chabot scanned him for signs of mockery. But found none. André-Louis continued.

"Not to do that which you acknowledge to be right merely from fear of the appearances, is hardly worthy of one who dwells in the pure atmosphere of the Mountain."

"You are under a misapprehension," Chabot retorted. "A man in my position, bearing the sacred trust imposed upon me by the People, must set an example in all the virtues."

"Agreed. Oh, agreed. But is it a virtue merely to appear virtuous when in your heart you know that your action is not virtuous? Is the shadow more important than the substance, Citizen-Representative?"

"It might be. Suspicion is but a shadow. There may be no

substance behind it. Yet if it fall across a man in these days . . ." He completed the sentence by a jab with the edge of his hand against his neck and a grim wink.

"So that it comes to this," said de Batz : "You are, after all, governed not by virtue but by fear."

Chabot became annoyed, and the Freys bestirred themselves to restore harmony. Junius filled the representative's glass, Emmanuel piled his plate. They protested that the repast was being ruined by the discussion. They would lose all the money engaged in the corsair venture and every franc besides rather than spoil the appetite of so worthy a guest.

"For the rest," said Junius, whilst Chabot fell once more to eating, "when have you ever known me advocate any measures that were not founded upon the purest republican principles? Look into my history, François, which I have so fully disclosed to you. Remember all the sacrifices of fortune and of the toys that despotism describes as honours which I have made in order to come and dwell in the pure air of a republican nation that shall rival the glories of ancient Rome. Should I, then—can you suspect it?—mislead you now for the sake of a paltry personal profit; a profit which I should never have sought if I had not seen that France would profit to an even greater degree?"

Chabot continued to eat while he listened. He was noisy over it and not at all nice to observe.

André-Louis followed up that shrewd assault upon the ramparts of the representative's apprehensions.

"You do not perceive, and we have hesitated to point out to you, that the action to which we urge you is one in which you should cover yourself with glory. More shrewd than the superficial Delaunay, who demanded this decree, you perceive that by favouring the enemies of France it is actually harmful to the best interests of the Republic. I warn you that another will not overlook this as you have been doing, for it leaps to the eye as soon as mentioned. Will you leave it for someone else to garner the laurels with which we invite you to adorn your brows?"

With his mouth full, the representative stared at him. "What are the arguments that would carry that conviction?"

"You possess them already in what I have said. You shall have more if you need them. It is easy to plead convincingly and eloquently when a man pleads truthfully. *Magna est veritas et prevalebit*. Here we ask you to state nothing but the truth."

Chabot continued to stare at him, obviously shaken. Then he emptied his glass at a draught. And whilst he wavered, de Batz briskly pursued the attack.

"You have been prejudiced, Citizen-Representative, because you have misunderstood us. You have imagined that we are asking a service of you, when in fact we are showing you your opportunity."

"That's it," said Junius. "Name of a name! This good Chabot conceives that we are abusing the sacred duty of hospitality to take advantage of a guest. Ah, François! Name of a name! But that is to wrong me terribly."

"Leave it," said André-Louis on a sudden note of finality. "Since that is how Chabot feels, we must not press him. I will see Julien this evening. He will thank me for the chance which Chabot refuses."

But now Chabot displayed alarm.

"You go so fast!" he complained. "You reach conclusion before we have even had discussion. If I should come to see clearly that this interdict is against the best interests of the Nation, do you imagine that I should hesitate to demand its repeal? You must tell me more, Moreau. Let me have the arguments in detail. Meanwhile, I take your word for it that they are as pure and convincing as you all assert."

They applauded him. They congratulated him. They plied him with wine, and whilst he sipped it they talked philosophy and the Redemption of Man, the deliverance of the universe from the thralldom of despotism under which humanity was writhing and all the rest of the Utopian nonsense by which they would have reduced the world to the famine-stricken, blood-soaked state of France.

It was all very moving. Chabot, under the influence of wine and rhetoric, was brought to the verge of tears by pondering the unhappy lot of his fellow-men. All this, however, did not prevent him from turning a languishing eye ever anon upon the timid Léopoldine. His imagination likened her to a little partridge, so young, so shy and so tender; a toothsome morsel for an apostle of Freedom, for a patriot who, in his superb altruism and self-abnegation, was prepared to wade through mud and blood that he might redeem the world.

CHAPTER XXVI

CHABOT TRIUMPHANT

"In future, François, you will have faith in me, I think."

André-Louis stood with Chabot in the hall of the Tuileries

the ante-chamber of the Convention, at the foot of the great staircase which had run with blood a year ago, the blood which had washed away the sins of despotism from that erstwhile abode of tyranny, and fitted it to become the palace of the national liberators. They stood under the shadow of the statue of Liberty erected there, symbol of the young republic trampling upon the ignominies of the overpast age of despots.

Chabot had ascended the tribune that morning to demand the repeal of the interdict upon the corsairs. He had prepared his speech with the collaboration of André-Louis: a masterly achievement couched in Chabot's best denunciatory vein. He had denounced everybody denounceable: the reactionaries and foreign agents at home, the foreign powers still under the yoke of tyranny, arming their enslaved multitudes to make war upon the children of Reason and Liberty. It was the sacred duty of all patriots to make war upon that hydra of despotism whenever it reared any of its hideous heads, to attack it at every point where it was vulnerable, to bleed it white, so that its obscene form should no longer sprawl athwart a tortured world, so that its foul breath should no longer poison long-suffering humanity. That was at once a mission—the mission of encompassing a rule of universal brotherhood—and an act of self-defence. It could be opposed only by vile reactionaries and insidious counter-revolutionaries. He would welcome this opposition, for it would disclose the heads that were ripe for the National scythe.

With that formidable threat he stayed opposition before it was raised.

Then he passed on. He pointed out the vulnerability of their enemies upon the seas. The ships of the Bourbon who ruled in Spain and Naples, and whose subsidies maintained abroad the French members of that evil brood, plied the Mediterranean. Austrians sailed there, too, a menace to the shores of France. Even more insidious the keels of the papal galleys ploughed those waters, manned by the myrmidons of a pestilential church, whose poisonous doctrines had for centuries held the souls of men in bondage.

To make war upon these, to conduct against them a holy crusade—if he might employ a word of such evil associations in connection with an aim so lofty and pure—a group of enlightened patriots, whose first motive was the service of the Republic One and Indivisible, had equipped, armed and manned a fleet of vessels. An interdict had been placed upon these ships, upon the ground that their aim was robbery, and that robbery, being an act of anti-civism was not to be countenanced by an enlightened

Republic. Oh, what a sophistry was here ! How the shadow of evil was employed to obscure the substance of the good ! How were men, even the best-intentioned, betrayed by narrow views !

You conceive the remainder of this turgid harangue. The Convention listened, was moved to shame of itself for the decree that it had passed. It might even have been moved to express its condemnation of Delaunay for having demanded this decree, had not Delaunay, in anticipation and self-defence, abased himself in frank acknowledgment of his error as soon as the thunders of applause had ceased to roll in acclamation of Chabot's address. They came not only from the body of legislators, but from the galleries thronged with sectionaries, the women from the markets, the men from the gutter, the riff-raff of Paris which nowadays—ever since the fall of the Girondins—crowded there to keep an eye on the National representatives and to see that they discharged their duties properly.

Never had Chabot enjoyed a greater triumph, and the noise would be ringing even now in the ears of all Paris, borne from the hall of the Convention by the rabble which had acclaimed him.

The man to whom he owed so much, who had persuaded him against his every inclination to undertake this task, was justified of his belief that Chabot would have faith in him in future.

The ex-capuchin, untidily dressed, his red cap pressed upon his unkempt brown curls, stood flushed before him, with a sparkle in his eyes, a suspicion of swagger in the carriage of his compact figure, his dimpled chin held high above the soiled cravat so loosely knotted that it left bare his muscular throat.

"Faith in you ? It needed only that your arguments should be clearly presented. I am never slow, Moreau, to perceive where lies the interest of the people. That is my strength." And he passed on, strutting with self-sufficiency.

De Batz materialized out of the crowd that filled the hall and reached André-Louis' side. He pointed with his cane.

"The Citizen-Representative carries his nose in the air."

"Sic itur ad astra," said André-Louis. "He'll walk so now with his gaze on the stars until he comes to the precipice. When he goes over it he'll carry half the Republic with him."

They were joined by Delaunay, who was out of temper.

"Faith, you burrow and burrow like moles, you two. But what comes of it ?"

"You are impatient," said de Batz. "A vice, Delaunay."

"I am poor," said the deputy, "and I want money. I doubt

if Chabot will ever come into your operations. What need to wait?"

"There is none," said André-Louis. "Invest all you can procure in Freys' corsairs, and riches will follow. The Mediterranean venture has the blessing of Chabot and of the Nation, and is therefore safe for any patriot."

Junius Frey, aglow with satisfaction, came to join them, and carried them off to the hospitalities of the Rue d'Anjou.

On their way they came upon Chabot at the corner of the Rue St. Thomas du Louvre, addressing a crowd that formed a bread-queue outside a baker's shop. He was haranguing these starvelings upon republican virtue. He assured them that they suffered in the noblest of all causes, and that the consciousness of this would sustain them in these days of tribulation shared by all. He was promising them that they would emerge into a season of fraternal ease and plenty so soon as by their fortitude they had crushed the vile enemies of freedom who sought to break their lofty republican spirit by subjecting them to these hardships.

Despite their hunger, his fiery eloquence intoxicated them. A hoarse cry was raised of "Vive Chabot!" and rang in the ears of his friends as they approached the scene. Waving his red cap to the famished crowd, Chabot went off, his own mouth watering at the prospect of the succulent fare that awaited him in the Rue d'Anjou.

They entered the courtyard, a cool, pleasant place on that day of oppressive heat, so thick with shrubs as to have almost the appearance of a little garden. In the middle a fountain played, adorned by a figure of Liberty in bronze, by which the ultra-republican Freys had replaced the sylvan god originally presiding there.

They were merry at table. Chabot, exalted by his success, talked much and drank more. He said such beautiful things that the Freys were moved to embrace him, hailing him as the noblest patriot since Curtius, a man worthy of the highest honours that a grateful nation could bestow. Chabot embraced them in return. He insisted upon embracing André-Louis, by whom he had been inspired, and he took advantage of this atmosphere of fraternity and republican love to embrace also the little Léopoldine, who suffered it in terror and sat afterwards with lowered eyes in a flaming agony of shame.

Junius, acting upon a hint from André-Louis, insisted upon rewarding him.

"It is but fitting that you should share in the benefits that will accrue to the Nation from your championship of the cause of

these patriotic corsairs. My brother and I are investing five hundred louis for you in the venture."

Chabot demurred with great dignity. "A noble action should be disinterested. Only thus can the motive remain pure."

"The investment these good Freys are making for you," said André-Louis, "will be multiplied by ten within six months."

Chabot permitted himself a mental calculation. Five thousand louis would be a little fortune. Temptation seized him. He remembered perhaps the delectable Descoings who had slipped through his fingers because he lacked the golden cords with which to bind such a woman to himself, leaving him only the cross-eyed, sour-tempered Julie Berger to comfort his loneliness. He considered this generous repast which he had shared, whilst those wretches to whom he had preached fortitude were tightening their belts in bread-queues. And André-Louis, innocent of appearance, insidious of speech and manner, was driving the temptation home.

"There is a dignity to be maintained by one who is a leader of this great nation, and hitherto, Citizen-Representative, you have lacked the means to maintain it. To such shining qualities, such lofty altruism and such consuming patriotism as are yours, there is no need to add the Spartan virtue of frugality."

The bibulous Chabot embraced them all again, with increasing fervour, and as the little Léopoldine came last the greatest fervour of those embraces fell to her. She fled thereafter in confusion, on the verge of tears, it seemed to André-Louis.

Of this he was to have later confirmation. As he was departing with de Batz, she appeared before them in the courtyard, emerging from behind a clump of laurel. She was white and trembling.

"Monsieur Moreau," she begged, reverting to the unpatriotic title in her distress.

André-Louis stood still. De Batz, after a glance and a lift of his heavy brows, went tactfully on towards the wicket.

"I wanted to say, monsieur," she faltered, and here broke down to begin again. "I hope you . . . you did not think that I . . . that I welcomed the . . . the liberties of the Citizen Chabot."

André-Louis was taken aback. He stared at her, conscious perhaps for the first time of her comeliness and the appeal of her youth. He was troubled.

"The Citizen Chabot is a great man in the State, child," he said, scarcely knowing what he meant.

"What has that to do with it? If he were the King himself it would make no difference to me."

"I believe it, mademoiselle." He too forgot the rule under which they lived. Very gently he added: "You are not answerable to me for your actions."

She looked up at him shyly. Then her eyelids fluttered and her soft brown eyes were lowered again. "I wanted you to know, Monsieur Moreau."

He had never felt more utterly at a loss. Chabot's voice sounded, loud and crowing, behind them on the stairs. She fled in terror, to vanish again amid the laurels. André-Louis, in thankfulness for the interruption, went swiftly on.

Outside the wicket the Baron awaited him, and greeted him with a searching look.

"It is not only politics that brings you to the Rue d'Anjou, mon petit," he asserted, his tone sardonic.

André-Louis, the eyes of his soul at that moment on the fair image of Aline de Kercadiou, answered him impatiently.

"You mistake me. I am not given to banalities. The child may have sensed it in me. What do I know?" He was out of temper. "Lengthen your stride," he added harshly. "That beast Chabot is behind. He comes with a bursting belly to admonish starveling patriots to tighten their belts for the greater glory of this famine-stricken republic."

"You're bitter in your triumph."

"Triumph! A triumph of foulness over foulness! Those odious, oily Jews with their greed and their hypocrisy! Chabot, the convent-rat! Delaunay ready to sell his country that he may purchase him his woman. And we, fawning upon them, that we may fool them to their doom."

"If they are as foul as you perceive them, your conscience should be easy on that score. Besides, there is an end to serve, a cause to be upheld, which justifies any means."

"It is what I ask myself."

"Name of God, what ails you? Hitherto your calculating ruthlessness has almost terrified me at moments. Are you weakening?"

"Weakening?" André-Louis made a rapid examination of conscience. "No. I grow impatient. Impatient for the day that sends the pack of them to the National Barber."

"Faith, then, you have but to proceed as you are doing. The day is not far distant."

CHAPTER XXVII

MATCHMAKING

THE Citizen-Representative François Chabot strutted into his sordid lodgings in the Rue St. Honoré with the sense of being by much a greater man than when he had left it that morning to repair to the Convention. He felt indeed like some lesser Atlas bearing the French Nation upon his shoulders.

Godlike and truculent, he came into those shabby two rooms and the presence of Julie Berger. The one and the other offended him. Here was an incongruous Olympus, an incongruous goddess. He spurned her fawning greeting and stamped into the middle of the sordid room to survey it with the eyes of scorn.

"May God damn me," was precisely what he said ("Que Dieu me damne."), "if I will support this longer."

"What offends you, my cherished one?" quoth the cross-eyed in conciliatory accents. Although a scold by nature, here instinct warned her scolding would be out of season.

"What offends me? To the devil with it all, I say!" His left hand on his hip, his head thrown back, he made a sweeping comprehensive gesture with his free right arm. "To the devil with it all! And to the devil with you! Do you know who I am? François Chabot, Deputy for Loir-et-Cher in the National Convention, the wonder of the intellectuals, the idol of the people, the greatest man in France at this moment. And you ask me who I am!"

"I did not ask you, my love," she protested mildly, perceiving that his attack of egomania was unusually violent, and perceiving also that he was not quite sober. "I know who you are. I know what a great man you are. Do I not know it?"

"Oh, you do?" He eyed the ponderous, sagging body so shabby in its faded black, the pallid face that was robbed of comeliness by its squint; he became conscious of the grime upon it, of the horrid, ill-kempt condition of the brown hair, wisps of which thrust untidily from her capacious mob-cap. There was almost dislike of her in that glance of his. "Then, if you know it, how can you suffer that I should continue in these surroundings. Is this a dwelling for a representative of the sacred people? These broken shards, this common furniture, this filthy uncarpeted floor! All this detracts from the dignity of my office. I owe it to myself and to the people whom I represent to house myself in dignity."

She tittered venomously. "Why, so you do, my friend. But dignity costs money."

"Money? What is money?"

"Filth, so you say. But it's useful filth. It brings the things you lack and I lack. What is the use of being a great man? What's the use of having people run after you in the street, point you out to one another, and shout 'Long live Chabot'? What's the use of all this, my cherished one, when we have no money, when we live like pigs in a sty?"

"Who says I have no money?" He snorted furiously. "Money! I have all the money a man desires. It is at my command. I have but to put forth my hand and take it."

"In the name of God, then, put forth your hand. Let me behold this miracle."

"It is done. Mine is the purse of Fortunatus, the hand of Midas."

"Whose purse?" quoth she, wondering had madness this time gone too far for recovery.

He paced the chamber, his chin in the air, his gestures like those of an actor at the Théâtre Français. He talked volubly, boasted freely. He owned a fleet in the Mediterranean; the resources of the bank of the Brothers Frey were at his command. He must be better housed than this, better clothed, better . . . He broke off. He had been about to say better accompanied, but a timely remembrance of her potentialities in venom checked him.

Yet although he did not utter the word, she sensed it, and her smile changed. It grew bitter and cunning. She sat down to observe him. Then she uttered words that administered a cold douche to his exaltation, and brought him to a panic-stricken halt.

"So the Freys have bribed you, eh? They've paid you well to get a repeal of the decree against their corsairs. Behold your fleet, my friend."

His eyes stood forward on his face. He made a noise in his throat like the inarticulate growl of a beast. For a moment she cowered in terror, believing that he was about to leap upon her. This indeed was his impulse: to strangle that vile throat of hers so that never again should it utter such a blasphemy. But prudence mastered rage. How much did this woman know?

"What's that you say, Jezebel?"

"What I know." She laughed at him, perceiving herself safe again. "What I know. Do you suppose that I can't read

because I am cross-eyed, or do you suppose my education was neglected?"

"Read? What have you read?"

"The speech that was written for you by somebody; the Freys belike. Ha, ha! You'd like the people to know that, wouldn't you? That those foreign Jews put words into your mouth so that you may seduce the representatives and the people, and that they pay you for the dirty job. A patriot, you! You! The greatest man in France, the wonder of the intellectuals, the idol of the people! You!" The scold's nature had come uppermost. Malice poured from her in a foul torrent of mockery.

"Silence, harridan!" He was livid. But she saw that he was no longer dangerous. Pusillanimous she knew him, this woman from whom he had no secrets, and she saw how fear was sobering and subduing him.

"I'll not be silent. Not I. Why should I be silent?"

"Because if I have more of this, I'll fling you back into the street from which I took you."

"So that I may tell the people how you sold yourself to the Austrian Jews?"

He eyed her with formidable dislike. "Putaine!" With that vile word he swung aside and went to sit down. He was suddenly limp. He had nursed a snake in his bosom. This woman might have the will, as she had the power, to ruin him. He must temporize, conciliate. Threats could not avail him against one who held all the weapons.

Meanwhile she raged on. That foul name contemptuously flung had acted as a goad. Her strident voice—the voice with which Nature seems ever to endow the shrew—shrilled up. It floated out through the open windows, and could be heard in the street below. Neighbours paused to listen, smiled and shrugged. The Citizen-Representative Chabot was at one of his love-scenes with his borgnesse. He might rule a Nation, but he would never rule that woman.

He strove to calm her. "Quiet, my dear! In Heaven's name, a little calm! Sh! The neighbours will hear you! Listen now, my dove! Listen! I supplicate, my little one!"

Not until she was out of breath, invective momentarily exhausted, did he really have an opportunity. He seized it, and talked rapidly. He reasoned. It was not at all as she supposed. He presented the case to her as the Freys and André-Louis had presented it to him. What he had done, he had done from a sense of duty. The rewards that came to him

were rewards that he might take with an easy mind, and for which he could answer freely before the tribunal of his conscience.

She listened, sneering. Then perceiving profit perhaps in accepting these explanations, she ceased to sneer. She demanded.

"I understand. I understand, my love. You are right. We should be better housed, better fed, better clad. Look at me. I am in tatters. Give me ten louis, that I may go and buy myself a gown to do you credit." She rose and held out her hand.

"In a few days" he answered readily, thankful that the storm had passed.

"Now," she insisted. "At once. Since you are rich I will not go in rags a moment longer. Look at this gown. It goes to pieces if you pull it."

"But I have no money yet. That is to come."

"To come? When?"

"What do I know? In a few days, a few weeks, perhaps."

"A few weeks!" She was shrill again. "Why, what a fool you are, Chabot! In your place. . . ." She checked.

More cunning than Chabot in the minutiae of life, she perceived what he had overlooked, the omission which in his place she would never have been so foolish as to have made. As it was she could correct it.

Two mornings later she blossomed forth in a new gown, striped red and black, high-waisted as the fashion was, new shoes and stockings, and a new mob-cap under which her hair for once was tidily disposed. The Citizen-Representative opened his eyes, and demanded explanations. She tittered and was archly mysterious.

"We are not all of us such fools as you, Chabot. I am not one to go thirsty when there's a well within reach."

That was all that she would tell him, and he went off perplexed, the mystery unsolved. Junius Frey could have solved it for him, and had thought of doing so. But upon further reflection the financier preferred to seek the Citizen Moreau and his friend de Batz, of whose judgment and ability he had by now been afforded such signal proof.

He found them at home when Tissot admitted them to their lodging in the Rue de Ménars. He made no attempt to minimize his uneasiness, which indeed scarcely needed expressing, for the signs of it were in his countenance. He rumbled forth a flood of lamentations in his deep guttural voice. He announced that they were sold, betrayed. That puffed-up fool Chabot had allowed their secret to be discovered. His indiscretion had

forged a sword which was being held over the head of Junius. He was being shamelessly blackmailed.

"Blackmailed!" It was André-Louis who stirred to that word, adducing the whole story from it. "Let me know by whom. I have a short way with blackmailers."

His grim confidence in himself was inspiring. Frey entered into explanations. Chabot had a housekeeper—this was the euphemism he employed to describe Julie—who was a traitress. She had discovered details of the business of the corsairs, and she had come to him yesterday to demand money.

"Did you give her any?"

"What else could I do? For the moment I have stopped her mouth with twenty louis."

André-Louis shook his head. "Not enough."

"Not enough! Oh, my God! But I am then to give everything away? Chabot himself has had——"

"No matter what Chabot has had. You should have given her two hundred. That would have compromised her. I would have done the rest for you."

But de Batz joined issue with him. "You can't deal with her as you dealt with Burlandeux. She is in possession of dangerous facts."

André-Louis retired from the debate, and left it to de Batz and Junius. They concluded nothing. And this, after Junius had gone again, his panic undiminished, de Batz revealed to be precisely what he desired. He rubbed his hands and laughed.

"The thing is done, I think. Let the fair Julie precipitate the avalanche."

But André-Louis was scornful. "Is that your notion of an avalanche, Jean? Why, it's scarcely a snowball. Let Julie dare to throw it at the idol of the mob, and her head will pay for her temerity. I waste no thought on her. I have work to do this morning. I am to write an article for the *Père Duchesne* in praise of Chabot, for his labours of two days ago." He smiled grimly. "The higher we hoist him, the heavier the crash when he comes down. And I have promised Hébert an article demanding the expropriation of all foreign property in France. That should be popular."

You may still read both those articles, the one a pæan of praise, the other a bitter Philippic, both couched in the flamboyant inflammatory jargon of that Age of Reason, and both bearing the signature Scaramouche, a *nom de guerre* which he was already rendering famous.

De Batz, however, was dubious of the timeliness of the

second article. He accounted it premature, and said so at length. "It will definitely ruin the Freys, and we may still need them for our purposes."

André-Louis laughed. "It would ruin the Freys if it were not for Chabot. Chabot will be moved to protect them. Don't you see? That is the trap in which I hope to take him. Lebrun will help him. Both will be compromised, and the compromising of two such prominent conventionals should set up a fine stench for the people's nostrils."

But de Batz was persuaded that Chabot would take fright, and leave the Freys to their fate. "The fellow is a poltroon. You are forgetting that."

"I am forgetting nothing. In the matter of money Chabot has tasted blood: the merest taste. But it has given him an appetite for more. He'll not allow the source of it be cut off without a struggle. Leave this to me, Jean. I see very clearly where I am going."

De Batz, however, for all his faith in his remorselessly shrewd and energetic associate, was not reassured. He brooded over the matter. With brooding his persuasion grew that it would require stronger bonds than those now binding Chabot to the Freys before the conventional could be moved to take the risk of defending the brothers from the proposed decree of expropriation. Here was a problem for his ready wits. The thought of Julie Berger intruded upon his brooding, and suddenly he was inspired. The inspiration took him forthwith to the Rue d'Anjou.

The brothers received the Baron in the green-and-white salon, over whose elegancies presided an austere bust of Brutus set upon a tall marble-topped console. Conceiving his visit to be concerned with this distressing business of the Berger, they enlarged upon it at once.

"Be easy," the Baron confidently reassured them. "What she can do at present is less than nothing. She holds no proof. A man in Chabot's position is not to be destroyed by an unsupported denunciation. It would recoil upon the head that utters it. If Julie were to commit this indiscretion, fling this handful of mud at the popular idol, she would get herself torn to pieces for her pains. Make that clear to her next time she seeks you, and send her packing."

Thus he elaborated the opinion conveyed to him in a half-dozen words by André-Louis.

The Freys considered the point of view, and were partially pacified. But only in so far as the past was concerned.

"This time it may be so," said Junius. "But there will

always be danger so long as that evil-disposed woman is about. She may surprise other secrets. Chabot is not discreet. He drinks too much, and when he's drunk he's given to boasting. Sooner or later she may be in a position to ruin him, and, what is worse—oh, I am frank with you, citizen—she will be in a position to ruin those who are associated with him."

"She must be eliminated," said the Baron, so grimly that it startled them.

Emmanuel shivered and breathed noisily. Junius stared. "How?"

"That's to be discovered. But discovered it must be. It is more important even than you yet realize. For very soon you may be needing Chabot's support as you have never yet needed it."

That shook them afresh. Scared interrogation was in the eyes of both. De Batz flung his bombshell.

"It has just come to my knowledge that there is a movement on foot to demand that the confiscation be decreed of the property of all foreigners resident in France."

This was terrifying. Emmanuel, in a long shabby coat that added to his overgrown appearance, stood paralysed, with fallen jaw. Junius, on the other hand, mixed rage with his panic. He turned purple and grew voluble. Such a thing would be an outrage. It was against the comity of nations. It must be the work of madmen. The Convention would never yield to any such demands.

"The Convention!" In utter frankness de Batz permitted himself to be scornful. "Are you still under the delusion that the Convention governs France. It may do. But the mob governs the Convention. Vox populi, vox dei, my dear Junius. That is the watchword of the Republic. The mob, directed by the Jacobins and the Cordeliers, is the real master. Hébert is to print an article demanding this expropriation. The demand will be so popular that the Convention will be powerless to resist it even if it has the will to do so."

Emmanuel found his quavering voice to demand the source of the Baron's information.

"That is not important. Accept my word for it that the article is already written. Within a few days it will be printed and read. Within a few days again you will see the decree promulgated. That is inevitable."

Junius accepted conviction. "I suppose that sooner or later it was inevitable in such a country as this, with a people such as this." He was bitter about the land of his adoption.

this land which was being swept by the exhilarating and purifying winds of Liberty.

His conviction shattered Emmanuel's last hopeful doubt. His weak eyes looked tearfully at his sturdy brother.

"Oh my God! Oh, my God! This is ruin! Ruin! The end of everything!"

De Batz agreed with him. "It is certainly grave."

Junius let his anger run free. Furiously he held forth upon his patriotic sentiments, his republicanism, his services to and his sacrifices in the holy cause of Liberty. He dwelt upon the friendships he had formed in the Jacobins and the Convention, spoke of the national representatives who had been free of his table and who had enjoyed even to the point of abuse the hospitality which he dispensed to all true patriots. It was unthinkable that he should be so ill-required.

"It's an ungrateful world," de Batz reminded him. "Fortunately I am able to warn you in time."

"In time? In time for what? You mock me, I think. What measures can I take?"

"You have a stout friend in Chabot."

"Chabot! That poltroon!" Wrath was rendering Junius illuminatingly frank.

"He served you well in the matter of the corsair fleet."

"He had to be driven to it, simple as it was. How should we drive him now and if the decree is passed what can he do? Even he?"

"True, he would be powerless, then. You must act before the decree is promulgated."

"Act!" Junius strode wildly about the room on his sturdy legs. "How can I act? What is in your mind, Citizen de Batz?"

"Make his interests one with your own, so that he rises or falls with you. Oh, a moment. I have given this matter thought, for naturally it interests me too. If you sink, my friend Moreau and I will suffer heavily in our investments with you. This is no time for half measures, unless you are prepared to see all your wealth absorbed into the national treasury, and yourselves cast naked upon the world. Chabot can save you if you can arouse in him the courage and the will to do so."

"Heiliger Gott! Tell me how it is to be done. How? There's the difficulty."

"No difficulty at all. Bind Chabot to you in bonds that will make your cause his own, and so compel him for his own sake to champion it."

"Where am I to find such bonds?" demanded Junius at the height of exasperation.

"In God's name where?" cried Emmanuel, wagging his narrow head.

"They are under your hand. The only question is will you care to employ them."

"That would not be the question. I should like to know what bonds I possess that I would not employ in such an extremity."

De Batz tapped his snuff-box and proffered it. Junius swept the courtesy aside by an impatient gesture; Emmanuel declined by a gentle shrinking. They were breathing hard in their impatience. But the Gascon was not to be hurried. Between poised finger and thumb, delicately, he held the pinch.

"Chabot is fortunately unmarried. You have an eminently marriageable and very attractive sister. Have you not observed that Chabot is susceptible to the attraction? This may offer a means to save your fortune."

Smiling quietly upon their stupefaction, he snapped down the lid of his snuff-box with the thumb of one hand, whilst with the other he bore the pinch to his nostrils.

Junius, his feet planted wide, his dark brows knit, stood glowering at him in silence. It was Emmanuel who first found his voice.

"Not that! Not little Léopoldine! Ah, that . . . that is too much. Too much!"

But de Batz paid no heed to him. He knew that decision lay with the elder brother, and that no merely emotional explosions from Emmanuel would influence it. He dusted some fragments of snuff from his cravat, and waited.

At last Junius growled a question. "Is Chabot in this? Have you discussed it with him?"

De Batz shook his head. "He is not even aware that the decree is to be demanded. And he should be kept in ignorance until you have him fast. That is why it is necessary to act quickly."

"Why should you suppose that he will agree?"

"I have seen the way he looks at your sister."

"The way he looks at her! That satyr! It's the way he looks at every woman. The result of a monastic education."

"But Léopoldine!" Emmanuel was complaining. "You could not contemplate it, Junius."

"Of course not. Besides, what could it avail us in the end? And we do not even know that Chabot desires a wife."

"The desire might be quickened." De Batz sat back in his chair, crossing his legs. "A dowry might determine the matter. It need not be exorbitant. Chabot's views of money are still comparatively modest. Say a couple of hundred thousand francs."

Junius exploded. His visitor must suppose that his supplies were inexhaustible. He had to pay here and pay there and pay everywhere. He could not move without paying. He was growing tired of it.

"If you let things take their course, you'll have no more troubles of that kind," said the sardonic de Batz. "After all, you must one day be marrying your sister, and you will have to provide her with a dowry. Could you possibly marry her to greater advantage than to one who is already almost the first man in France, and may soon stand firmly in that position? Think of your republican sentiments, my friend."

Suspecting mockery, Junius eyed him not without malevolence.

"But Chabot!" Emmanuel was bleating in horror. "Chabot!"

"Bah!" said Junius at length. "What, after all, can the marriage profit us? Shall we be foreigners any the less when it is made? Shall we be the less liable to these expropriations?"

De Batz smiled the smile of superior shrewdness. "Evidently you have not perceived the possibilities. It might, indeed, be that the brothers-in-law of a representative of Chabot's consequence would never be regarded as foreigners; that no legislation against foreign property could be understood to include theirs. This may come to be the case. But I have something more solid and assured for you."

"You will need to have, by Heaven!"

"Once your sister is married to Chabot, she, at least, will have ceased to be a foreigner. Marriage will bestow upon her the French nationality of her distinguished husband. Her funds will be in no danger of confiscation whatever happens. Do you see how simple it becomes? You transfer to her—to her and Chabot—all your possessions, and that is the end of your difficulties."

"The end of my difficulties!" Junius' deep voice went shrill in protest. "You tell me that will be the end of my difficulties! I am to make over all my property to my sister, to my sister and her husband Chabot, and that makes me safe, does it? But at that rate, my friend, I might as well suffer confiscation."

De Batz waved a hand to quiet him. "You assume too much. The transference I suggest need not amount to the surrender of a single franc. I have thought it out. In the marriage contract you enter into an engagement to pay Chabot's wife over a term of

years certain sums which in the aggregate will amount to your total present possessions. Don't interrupt me, or we shall never be done. Such an engagement, absorbing all you possess, will leave nothing available for confiscation."

Junius could contain himself no longer. "You substitute one form of confiscation by another. Fine advice, as God lives!"

"I do nothing of the kind. Observe my words more closely. I say that you enter into an engagement to pay. I did not say that you actually pay."

"Oh! And the difference?"

"The engagement is of no effect. You engage to donate. Now a donation, under our existing laws, is valid only if formally accepted. Léopoldine being a minor has no legal power to accept. The donation must be accepted for her by a guardian or trustee. You will overlook this legal necessity, and you may rest assured that the omission will never be noticed. Whilst, then, leaving the donation without validity, so that neither Chabot nor your sister could ever claim fulfilment, it will, nevertheless, create the appearances necessary to place your fortune beyond the reach of confiscation. That, my good friends, is the way to save it. And it is the only way."

It was indeed, as Junius at last perceived. A guttural German oath was his intimation that the light of this revelation had momentarily dazzled him.

"Oh, but Léopoldine! My little Léopoldine!" Emmanuel was quavering in fearful protest.

Savagely Junius turned upon him. "Don't distract me with your bleating." He took a turn in the room, and came to a halt with his shoulders to the overmantel and the clock of Sèvres biscuit. The earlier gloom had passed from his face. There was a lively keenness in his dark eyes. Thoughtfully he stroked his long, pendulous nose. "It is the way. Undoubtedly it is the way," he muttered. "Oh, but one cannot hesitate to take it, provided that Chabot . . ."

"I will answer for Chabot. The prospect of so much wealth will bring him to your will. Be sure of that. If more is necessary remind him that the looseness of his frequent amours is putting a weapon into the hands of his enemies. The day of aristocratic vice is overpast. The people demands purity of life in its representatives. He must not lie exposed to scandal. It is time he sought refuge from it in matrimony. That is the second argument. The third is Léopoldine herself."

Junius nodded his big head. Emmanuel regarded him in distress without daring to protest again.

CHAPTER XXVIII

LÉOPOLDINE

THE Baron de Batz came back to the Rue de Ménars, to find André-Louis in shirt sleeves, writing the closing words of his encomium on Chabot. He was in high spirits, the result of fruitful concentration.

"I have endowed François Chabot with all the virtues of Brutus, Cicero, and Lycurgus." There was a sparkle in the dark eyes, a flush on the lean face as he flung down his pen. "A great morning's work!"

But de Batz accounted his own labours of greater consequence. "Whilst you have been merely praising Chabot, I have been marrying him."

With a touch of pride he reported his transaction with the Freys. He was met by stark dismay.

"You have done this? Without consulting me?"

De Batz was not only disappointed of the praise for which he had looked; he was piqued.

"Without consulting you? Am I to consult you upon every step I take?"

"It would be more prudent, and more courteous. I have consulted you at every step."

There was argument upon this, and it began to assume a tone of acerbity. De Batz set himself to point out all the advantages which this marriage must bring to the campaign they were conducting. André-Louis broke in upon these indications.

"I know all that. I perceive it all. But the means! It is with the means that I am quarrelling. There is a limit to those we may employ. A limit imposed by decency, which no cynicism may overstep."

"On my soul, this comes well from you! You shrink from cynicism? You? Why, what the devil ails you?"

"We'll play this game without using that unfortunate child as a pawn in it."

De Batz passed from amazement to amazement. "Of what account is she?"

André-Louis smote the table with his open palm. "She has a soul. I do not traffic in souls."

"I could tell you of others who possess souls. Others whom you hound relentlessly. Has Chabot no soul, or Delaunay, or Julien, or the Freys, or that fellow Burlandeux whom you sent to

the guillotine without a twinge of conscience? Or Julie Berger, with whom you would have dealt in the same way?"

"Those persons are vile. I give them what they seek. Burlandeux wanted blood. He got it. His own. But why quibble? Will you compare the beasts we are engaged in exterminating with this poor inoffensive child?"

And now de Batz, remembering a moment in the courtyard of the Rue d'Anjou, broke into laughter and derision.

"I see, I see! The little partridge, as Chabot calls her, was to be preserved for you. I am sorry, my friend. But we are the servants of a cause that admits of no such personal considerations."

André-Louis came to his feet. He was white with anger.

"Another word in this strain, and we quarrel, Jean."

Swift as lightning came the peppery Gascon's riposte: "That is a thing I never avoid."

Their breathing slightly quickened, they eyed each other with defiance whilst a man might count to twelve. André-Louis was the first to master himself. He turned aside.

"This way lies madness, Jean. It is not for you and me, surrounded as we are by dangers any one of which may at any moment send either of us to the guillotine, to set up a quarrel."

"The word was yours," said the Baron.

"Perhaps it was. You stung me with your imputation of base motives. It seemed an offence less against me than against someone who is to me an inspiration. To imply that I should be wanting in fidelity . . ." He broke off. De Batz was surveying him with a surprise that was faintly cynical. "It is the thought of her, who is pure and spotless, as I am sure is this poor child of the Freys, that makes the prospect horrible. If there were any such conspiracy against my Aline! I contemplate the agony to her, and grow the more conscious of the agony involved for little Léopoldine. She must not be a pawn in this game, Jean. She must not be a victim of our intrigues. She must not be part of the price at which we are to purchase the head of Chabot for the advancement of the House of Bourbon. We are on the fringe of infamy. And I will have no part in it, or countenance it."

De Batz heard him out with tightening lips and narrowing eyes, his Gascon temper roused by this unexpected opposition, this hostility to a piece of strategy in which he had been taking pride. But he curbed his feelings. As André-Louis had said, the circumstances surrounding them were too dangerous to admit

of their quarrelling between themselves. The matter must be settled by argument. De Batz must adopt conciliation.

"No need to harangue me at such lengths, André. I am sorry if my thought offended you, and I am relieved that your interest in the girl is not personal. That would have been a serious obstacle."

"Not more serious than it is."

"Ah, wait. You have insufficiently considered. You have lost sight of the aim. Great ends are not to be served without sacrifice. If we are to let emotion or sentiment govern us, we should never have set our hands to this task. It is not for ourselves that we labour. We are here to rescue a whole people from damnation, to recover a throne for its rightful owners, and to bring back to France the best of her children who have been driven into exile. Are we to boggle over the sacrifice of an insignificant little foreign Jewess in the course of a scheme which may send a hundred heads to the guillotine? Can we be nice? Will you remember that we are kingmakers?"

André-Louis knew that there was no answer save on the grounds of sentiment. But so repugnant was the vision of that pure, innocent child being flung in prey to the loathsome, crapulous, blood-stained ex-capuchin, that André-Louis could not harden himself against it.

"It may all be as you say," he answered. "And yet this thing shall not be. It will recoil upon us. Evil will come of it. I have been ruthless, as you say. At moments my ruthlessness has left you aghast. But I am not ruthless enough for this. It is too foul."

Still de Batz kept a tight grip upon his restive patience. "Oh, I admit the foulness. But there are other foulnesses to be combated, to be avoided. We want no repetitions of the September massacres, and such horrors. For that you never hesitated to lay a train that will end in bringing a score of Girondin heads under the knife of the guillotine. They are fine heads, too. Yet you quibble about this child of no account. We cannot be selective in our means. This is the only certain way, and I have taken it."

"It is not the only way. Others would have been found as effective. It was only a question of patience."

"Patience! Patience, when the Queen is languishing, tortured and insulted in prison, and may at any moment be haled forth to trial and ignominious death, together with her children? Patience, when the little King of France is in the hands of assassins who are ill-treating him and brutalizing him? Don't

you see that it is a race between us and the forces of evil that are at work to destroy those sacred members of the royal family? And you can talk of patience! You yield to gusty emotion over a negligible girl, to whom we do no worse wrong than thrust her into a wedlock to which she may at first be reluctant. Where is your sense of proportion, André?"

"In my conscience," he was fiercely answered. "I am not responsible for the sufferings of the Queen, and I . . ."

"You will be responsible for their protraction beyond what is necessary if you neglect any means to curtail them."

"The Queen herself would not desire her freedom, her safety, at this evil price."

"As a mother and a queen she must desire that of her children at any price."

"It remains that this price is one which my conscience will not suffer me to pay. It is idle to argue with me, Jean. I will not suffer it to be done."

"You will not suffer it? You?" And then, quite suddenly, de Batz broke into a laugh. He had seen something to which anger had been blinding him.

"You will not suffer it!" he cried yet again, but on an entirely different note, a note of unalloyed derision. "Prevent it then, my friend."

"That is my intention."

"And how will you accomplish it?"

"I shall go to the Freys at once."

"To ask for Léopoldine's hand in marriage for yourself? Not even so would you prevent it, unless you could inspire them with a faith in yourself greater than their faith in Chabot. Why, you fool, André! Do you dream that those avid Jews, faced with destitution and starvation unless they take prompt measures to entrench themselves, are going to allow any scruples about Léopoldine to check them? Faith! You are amusing, do you know? You are moved to a tenderness for their sister greater than that which they feel themselves, and this with no intention to make her either your mistress or your wife. Do you begin to see that you are ridiculous?"

"It does not make me ridiculous simply to be less foul than those about me."

"In which you include me, no doubt. Well, well, I'll suffer it. I must allow something to your knight-errant's chagrin."

"I'll prevent it somehow, God helping me."

"It will tax your quixotry, short of murdering Chabot, which would merely bring you to the guillotine. You are beating your

head against a wall of sentiment, mon petit. Leave it. Ours is a serious mission. Sacrifices there must be. At any moment we may be sacrificed ourselves. Does not that justify us of everything?"

"It cannot justify us of this. And I will have no part in it." He was vehement.

De Batz ill-humouredly shrugged his shoulders and turned away.

"So be it. There is no need why you should have part in it. The train is laid. Not all your efforts could now stamp it out. Salve your conscience with that. The rest will happen of itself."

It was true enough. It was happening even then. For in his panic Junius allowed no time to be lost. And Fate conspired with de Batz by sending Chabot to dine with the Freys that day after the sitting of the Convention.

Léopoldine was in her usual place at table, flushing and uncomfortable, her pudicity affronted by the increasingly ardent oglings of Chabot, her flesh creeping when he pawed her soft round arm and leered into her eyes as he called her his little partridge. Once before Emmanuel, observing this amorousness in the ex-capuchin, had proposed to his brother that Léopoldine should not be brought to table when Chabot was present, and Junius had been disposed to adopt the suggestion. But to-day things were different. Symptoms which previously had dismayed Emmanuel and annoyed Junius were now not welcomed.

When the meal was done, and Chabot sat back replete and at ease, his greasy reingote unbuttoned, Junius opened the attack. Léopoldine had gone about her household duties, and the three men sat alone. Emmanuel was nervous and fidgety. Junius stolid as an Eastern idol for all his inner anxieties.

"You have a housekeeper, Chabot."

"So I have," said Chabot with disgust.

"She is dangerous. You must get rid of her. One of these days she will sell you. She has been to demand a present from me, as the price of her silence upon our transactions with the corsairs. That is not a woman to retain about you."

Chabot was disturbed. He cursed her roundly and obscenely. She was a vile baggage; insolent and ill-natured. It was only wanting that she should turn blackmailer as well.

"But, after all, what can I do?"

"You can send her packing before she is in a position seriously to compromise you. Such a woman is unworthy of association with a republican of your integrity."

Chabot scratched his unkempt head and grunted. "All that

is very true. Unfortunately the association has already gone rather far. You may not have observed that she is about to become a mother."

It was a momentary set-back for Junius. But only momentary.

"All the more reason to get rid of her."

"You don't understand. She asserts that I am the father of this future patriot."

"Is it true?" came the quavering voice of Emmanuel.

Chabot blew out his cheeks, and raised his shoulders; he inflated his chest. The impeachment was not one that in any case would have disturbed him. "I am like that. What use to inveigh against it? It is no more than human, I suppose. I was never built for celibacy."

"You should take a wife," said Junius sternly.

"I have thought about it."

"At the moment it would afford you a sound pretext for ridding yourself of that squinting beldame. You cannot keep a wife and a mistress under the same roof. Even the Berger must recognize that, and so she may be less vindictive than if you put her in the street for any other reason."

Chabot was scared. "But you've said that she is black-mailing you with her knowledge of that corsair transaction." He got up, upsetting his chair in his preturbation. "May God damn me, I knew I was engaging in a dangerous business. I should have sent you all to the devil before ever I——"

"Calm, man! Calm!" Junius thundered. "Was ever anything achieved by panic? Of what can she accuse you, after all? Are you so poorly regarded that the breath of a vindictive woman can blow you away? Where are her proofs of what she asserts? You have but to say that she lies, and the National Barber will do the rest. A little firmness, my friend. That is all you need. Show her plainly what will be the consequences of denouncing you."

Chabot took courage.

"You are right, Junius. A patriot of my integrity, a servant of the nation, a pillar of the Republic such as I am is not to be dismissed upon the word of a jealous harriidan. If she dares to attempt such a disservice to France, it will be my duty to immolate her upon the altar of Liberty."

"Spoken like a Roman," Junius commended him. "Yours is the true spirit, Chabot. I am proud to be your friend."

The egregious ex-capuchin bolted the outrageous flattery. He threw back his head in proud consciousness of his worth.

"And I'll be guided by you, Junius. I will take a wife."

"My friend!" Junius rose, and went to enfold the representative in his powerful arms. "My friend! It is what I have hoped and desired! Thus the spiritual fraternity that already unites us through the republican sentiments we share will be strengthened by this carnal bond." Symbolically he tightened an embrace which was already rendering the flabby Chabot a little out of breath. "My friend! My brother!" He loosed him and turned to the younger Frey. "Embrace him, Emmanuel. Take him to your heart in body as you have already done in spirit."

The lanky Emmanuel complied. Chabot's breathlessness was increased by astonishment. Something here seemed to have been assumed, and he did not discern what.

"Our little Léopoldine will be overjoyed," said Junius. "Overjoyed."

"Your little Léopoldine?" Chabot was in a dream.

Junius, his head on one side, was smiling benignly upon the representative.

"Millionaires and noblemen have asked for the hand of my sister, and they have been refused. The *ci-devant* Duke of Chartres might sue for her, and even if he were a patriot, instead of a vile aristocrat, he should not win her. If you do not take her, Chabot, nobody in France shall have her."

Chabot's amazement became stupefaction. "But . . ." he stammered. "But I . . . I have no fortune . . . I——"

Junius interrupted him. The rich voice was raised in vehemence.

"Fortune? If you had that, you would not be the pure patriot that you are, which is why I account you worthy of my sister. She will be well dowered, Chabot. Two hundred thousand livres, so that there may be no change in the mode of life to which we have accustomed her. And on her wedding day we will give up to her these apartments. You shall come and live here with her. Emmanuel and I will remove ourselves to the floor above. Thus all arranges itself."

Chabot's eyes looked as if they would drop from his face. Here, at long last, was the reward of virtue! Not for nothing had he trodden the flinty path of duty. Not for nothing had he set his hand to the plough of reform and toiled in such self-abnegation for the good of humanity and of France. His labours were at last to yield the wages due. Two hundred thousand livres a handsome lodging and the little partridge, so plump and soft and meek.

When, the shock of surprise being spent, he was able to assure himself that all this was real, that he was not passing through a dream, he had an impulse to fall on his knees and return thanks to the betrayed God of his early days. But his stout republican spirit saved him in time from such a heresy against the newly-adopted Goddess of Reason who governed this enlightened Age of Liberty.

CHAPTER XXIX

THE BAIT

IF to Chabot the prospect of marriage was a dream, to Léopoldine, when she was informed of it, it was a nightmare.

For the first time in her docile young life she was in rebellion against the will of the masterful brother who was so much her senior. She would not marry the Citizen-Representative. She announced it flatly. To describe that august personage she employed such terms as hateful, detestable, repellent. He was not even clean, and she knew that he was not good.

They argued. She passed from indignant resistance to dismay when she perceived for how little her own wishes were to count. Finally she came to intercession and tears.

Emmanuel was so moved that he wept with her. But the Roman fibres of the sterner Junius remained unshaken. Aware that the weak points in her defences were her gentle kindness of spirit and her sense of duty, he directed his attack upon these. He told her the truth. Ruin stared them in the face. Their only chance of evading it lay in this marriage. She, at least, would no longer be a foreigner, and to her they would transfer the greater part of their possessions, nominally as her dowry, actually to be held in trust for them by her and her husband.

By coming to live with them, Chabot would render their fine house in the Rue d'Anjou his domicile, and none would dare to lay impious hands upon the domicile of that august representative of the sovereign people.

So far Junius was frank with his sister. Where he practised deception was in pretending that the representative had sought

her hand. In such a time of peril far from daring to reject the suit of a statesman of Chabot's eminence, he had welcomed it as a Heaven-sent chance to save themselves and to save her at the same time. For what must her fate be if they were ruined?

He passed on to speak of Chabot. The man might be a little rough externally, but this could be improved. To so ardent a lover a hint of how to render himself more acceptable to his mistress would suffice. For the rest that rough exterior covered a noble, kindly soul, aflame with republican zeal. Had it been otherwise could she suppose that Junius would ever have consented to sacrifice her? All was not gold that glittered, and much that did not glitter was gold.

If all the arguments he summoned could not suffice to conquer her repugnance, at least they defeated her opposition. If thereafter she was not resigned, at least she was submissive, regarding herself as a suitable sacrificial victim for the salvation of her brothers.

But there was one whom she desired should know the truth. Perhaps she hoped that the knowledge might move him to work some miracle for her deliverance.

And so on the morrow André-Louis received the following pathetic little note:

Citizen André-Louis,

My brother Junius tells me that I must marry the Citizen-Representative Chabot. That this is necessary for our security. I care nothing for my security. I would not buy it at this price, as I hope you will believe, Citizen André-Louis. But I must care for the security of my brothers. I suppose this is my duty. Women are the slaves of duty. But I do not love the Citizen Chabot. I think I am greatly to be pitied. I want you to know this. Good-bye, Citizen André-Louis.

The unhappy Léopoldine.

André-Louis laid the letter before de Batz. "You perceive the appeal between the lines," he said, his countenance dark.

De Batz read, sighed and shrugged. "What can I do? If the sacrifice could have been avoided I should have avoided it. I am no butcher of chickens. You know that I should not hesitate to sacrifice myself. Let that be my justification for consenting to sacrifice another."

"It is no justification. You are master of yourself. Your fate is in your own hands."

"Is any man's fate in his own hands? Besides, it is the fate

of a people that is concerned." His voice grew harshly imperious. "Ruthlessness becomes a sacred duty."

"What reply am I to make?"

"None. That will be kindest. The poor child seems to hope that she is something to you. In that hope she writes. Your silence will dispel it. She will the more readily submit to her destiny."

André-Louis, seated dejectedly on the striped settee, took his head in his hands. "That foul capuchin," he groaned. "As God lives he shall bitterly repent it."

"Of course he will. But he is no more responsible than the girl herself. In a sense he is as much a victim, although he does not yet perceive of what. But he will."

"And the Freys? These inhuman brothers who for the sake of their own profit throw their sister to that beast?"

"They shall also repent. Take comfort in that."

"And you, then? You who are responsible for it all?"

"I?" Erect and tense, de Batz looked at him with brooding eyes. "I am in God's hands. At least, however impure the course I take, I take it from no impurity of motive. I serve an idea, not myself. In this I am purer than you are. Perhaps on that account I am immune from the scruples that trouble you."

André-Louis thought of Aline, of his hopes of her which were the mainspring of his share in these tortuous activities. To bring his hopes to fruition he was prepared to go to almost any lengths, but not to the length of sacrificing an innocent child to the evil lust of that beast Chabot. Aline herself would shrink from him in horror, her purity outraged, if she thought him capable of adopting such means to reach her. Yet, as de Batz had pointed out, he was powerless now to prevent this thing.

The anger surging in him from that impotence came to be concentrated on Chabot. Because of Léopoldine he would pursue him the more ruthlessly, and already he perceived the means by which he could discredit and smash him utterly.

He was in that mood of vindictiveness when later in the day he was visited by Delaunay and Julien.

De Batz was absent, and André-Louis sat, pencil in hand, at his writing-table on which there was a litter of papers. He sat in shirt and breeches and with the venetians closed to exclude the sunlight, for the early September day was stiflingly hot. He was at work on the details of the scheme which he had conceived for the speedy ruin of Chabot. Delaunay came to issue something in the nature of an ultimatum. He and Julien desired to know when the operations in émigré property on a large scale were to

take place. Months had gone since first the matter had been mooted, and so far little had been done. They had been guided entirely by the wishes of the Citizen de Batz. But unless there were some prospect of real activity they proposed to operate independently.

"And thereby run your heads into the lunette of the guillotine." André-Louis lounged in his chair, one leg thrown over the arm of it, and looked up at them with a mocking eye. "Well, well! To be sure they are your own heads, and you may do as you please with them."

"Will you tell me for what we are waiting?" Delaunay asked, his habitual stolidity unimpaired by the young man's raillery.

André-Louis tapped the writing-table with his pencil. "The ground is still insufficiently prepared. Chabot has not yet been persuaded to come into the enterprise."

"To Hell with Chabot!" said Julien fervently.

"By all means," André-Louis agreed. "But not until we have done with him. You forget that his eminence is to be our shield. You are too impatient. Difficult enterprises are to be prepared slowly and executed quickly. That is the way to succeed in them."

Delaunay fell to grumbling in his deep, slow voice. "Devil take it all! At this rate it will be next summer before we may look for the harvest."

André-Louis was thoughtful, his half-closed eyes upon the papers on the table before him. He unhooked his leg from the arm of his chair, and sat up.

"You are pressed, eh, Delaunay? The Descoings begins to find your promises lean fare? She is impatient of more solid nourishment? If that's your trouble, I have here something else, something that offers an immediate return."

"That's the proposal for me," said Julien.

"And, faith, for me. What is it?"

André-Louis expounded briefly a scheme which for some days now had been engaging his attention. It concerned the India Company—the *Compagnie des Indes*—one of the few commercial enterprises in France whose credit had remained unimpaired by the upheaval of the Revolution.

"Under the law of the Eighth Frimaire of the Year One the shares of a Company become subject to the payment of certain dues on the occasion of each transfer of ownership. Have you observed that the India Company has been evading this law? I see that you haven't. You want to grow rich, yet you don't know where to look for wealth. The Company, let me tell you, has replaced

its shares by bonds similar to those issued by the State. Of these no transfers are required. All that is necessary is accomplished by a simple entry in the Company's register. Thus the tax is successfully evaded."

He took up a sheet that was covered with figures. "It's a simple form of fraud, and its success lies in its simplicity. I have computed that as a result the State has already been swindled of over two millions."

He paused, and looked up at the representatives, who stared back at him in round-eyed silence, until at last Delaunay broke out :

"But how the devil are we to profit by that?"

"By denouncing the fraud in the Convention, and foreshadowing some decree that will sow terror in the hearts of the shareholders."

"And then?"

"The price of the stock will fall to nothing. That will be your time to buy it. After you have bought, you will frame the decree. Indeed, you may frame two decrees: one that will completely ruin the Company, and another that will deal indulgently with its transgression. You will then give the directors to choose between the two. You offer the indulgent one at a certain price—say, a quarter of a million. With ruin as the only alternative, the directors must pay. Then, with the restoration of confidence, the shares will quickly rise again. You sell at twenty, fifty, perhaps a hundred times what you paid for them. In this way you will make two separate profits, and the second one may be enormous. It will be limited only by the courage with which you buy." He smiled up into their bulging eyes. "Simple, isn't it?"

Julien pronounced him a remorseless rogue, and swore under his breath to express his amazed appreciation of this rascally scheme. Delaunay's habitual stolidity gave way to laughter in which there was a scared note.

"You're a fine fellow, on my soul! I imagined that I knew something of finance. But this . . ."

"This is the fruit of genius. Chabot becomes more than ever necessary to us."

"Chabot?" Delaunay's face lengthened. "That means delay again."

André-Louis was firm and emphatic. "Not only Chabot but some other prominent and popular Montagnard. Bazire, for instance, whom you would have brought in before. He, too, stands close to Robespierre, and carries weight."

"But why?"

"It is necessary." André-Louis got up, and faced them standing. His manner increased in authority. "A commission will have to be appointed for the purpose of framing the two decrees which you will require. You must take care in advance that you have at hand the right men to compose it, men whose interests in the matter will be identical with your own. That is why these others must be brought in beforehand."

The object was clear to them at once. "If Chabot should refuse?" Delaunay asked.

"Conquer his hesitation by the offer of money down. Promise him a hundred thousand francs—more if necessary—for his immediate co-operation. I will supply the money." He pulled open a drawer of his writing-table, and took out a bundle of assignats bound with tape. He flung it down. "There it is. Take it, and bestir yourselves. This is no pettifogging affair. There's a chance of fortune if you go about it with address."

Spurred by the prospect of swift and easy fortune, they went about the business with all the address they could command. That same night at the Jacobins they jointly tackled Chabot, and bluntly put the matter to him. At first he recoiled in terror. The very magnitude of the operation daunted him. It seemed to him that where the profits were so vast the risks must be grave. But to show him that in the matter of a profit personal to himself there was no risk or doubt, Delaunay thrust under his nose the hundred thousand francs he had received for the purpose.

"Take them. They are yours as an earnest of all that you may make. And there are millions to be made."

Chabot gasped as he pondered that bundle of assignats.

"But if I expose the fraud of the India Company, how can I afterwards——"

"It will not be for you to do that," Julien interrupted him. "I will bell the cat. Your part will be to ask for a commission of investigation, and get yourself appointed to it with us and with one or two others we shall name to you. All you will have to do will be to frame the decrees."

Cupidity growing in his glance Chabot continued to eye the proffered money.

"Give me a moment," he begged his tempters, and mopped his brow. "What will be said when it is discovered that I have been buying the shares of the Company? What will——"

"Simpleton!" said Delaunay contemptuously. "Do you suppose that any of us will do that? We shall appoint Benoit or another to buy and sell for us. Our hands will not be seen at all."

Peremptorily he added : "It is you or another, Chabot. I give you the first chance because we are old friends. But resolve yourself. Will you take the money and join us or must I offer it elsewhere ?"

Before that immediate and terrible risk, Chabot capitulated. He stuffed the bundle into the breast of his shabby coat. Then he made a little oration.

"If I consent, it is only because I perceive that no harm can result to the Republic, or to any sound patriot. These rascally directors of the India Company, who have been defrauding the national treasury, will be the only sufferers ; and it is proper that they should be punished for their dishonesty. Yes, my friends. Before the tribunal of my conscience I stand clear. If it were otherwise let me assure you that no prospect of gain, however considerable, would move me to take part in this."

Julien looked at him with wonder in his deep-set eyes. 'Nobly spoken, Chabot. How worthy you ever prove yourself of the great trust the people repose in you. A man of your purity of republican principles is destined for the highest honours his country can bestow upon him.'

And the unfrocked priest, suspecting no irony in the speech of that rascally unfrocked parson, bowed his head. "I covet no honours. I desire but to perform the duty which my country has imposed upon me. The burden was not of my seeking. But I will carry it while my legs will bear me up, and while breath does not fail me."

They left him, to go and seek Bazire. As they went, "Do you know, Julien," said Delaunay in his gentle, sluggish voice "that the little rascal believes himself ?"

CHAPTER XXX

THE INDIA COMPANY

INFORMED of the successful association with the scheme not only of Chabot but also of Bazire, that other prominent deputy and pillar of the dominant party of the Mountain, André-Louis repaired on the morrow to the Convention, to hear Julien make his preliminary denunciation.

De Batz accompanied him, and together they found seats in the gallery, among the idle riff-raff which daily crowded it, and so often interrupted the proceedings of the legislators below in order to make clear to them how they should interpret the will of the sovereign people. For we are now in Fructidor of the Year 2 of the French Republic One and Indivisible, by the Calendar of Freedom. The Reign of Terror is sweeping to its climax. The dreadful Law of Suspects is being widely enforced. The law of the maximum has been enacted in an endeavour to restrain the constant rise in the price of the necessities of life which keeps pace with the constant depreciation of the paper money of the Republic. The lately-established Revolutionary Tribunal is submerged in business. Fouquier-Tinville, the public prosecutor, most zealous and industrious of public servants, can barely find time to eat or sleep. Executions are multiplying. The great daily spectacle is the passing of the tumbril to the Place de la Revolution where the axe of the guillotine clanks busily at the hands of Charles Sanson, the public executioner, fondly and familiarly known to the rabble as Charlot. The bread and meat queues grow longer and sadder; hunger becomes more general among the poor, the bread more and more foul. But the people suffer it out of faith in the integrity of the legislators, counting upon their assurances that this Lenten time is but the prelude to a season of plenty. Meanwhile, to delude and pacify them, doles are distributed to the indigent, largely as a result of the activities of the astute Saint-Just.

Nevertheless, the curtain continues to rise punctually at the opera, the cafés and eating-houses continue to be crowded at the usual hours by those who can afford to pay. Fevrier's in the Palais Royal does a brisk trade; at Venua's banquets are nightly spread for the prosperous and well-nourished representatives of a starving people. Life pursues its course, and such men as de Batz, if of sufficient circumspection and assurance, may move freely.

And freely de Batz moved, his clothes scrupulously elegant, his hair dressed with the same care as of old, his manner as assured and haughty as in the days before the fall of the Bastille. His confidence was based upon that great army of agents and associates, gradually recruited, which by now was permeating every stratum of Parisian life. André-Louis, moving as freely, relied in any emergency that might arise upon the protection of his civic card, which announced him for an agent of that dread body the Committee of Public Safety.

Thus these two came openly and without diffidence to mingle with the crowd in the gallery of the Convention.

There was little to interest them until the sturdy figure of Chabot was seen mounting the tribune to address the assembly, and they rubbed their eyes to behold a transmogrified Chabot. No longer was he the unkempt, unclean, red-bonneted sansculotte. He came spruce as a dandy in a tight-fitting brown frock and snowy cravat, his hair combed and tied. The assembly stared, assuming that at last he followed the fashion set by his illustrious leader the great Robespierre. This until the declaration he came to make suggested another explanation. He was there to proclaim himself a lover; and it was supposed that, like a bird at mating time, he had assumed this gay plumage suitably to fill the part.

"Before I pass to the questions of public interest upon which it is my duty to address you, I desire to touch upon a matter entirely personal to myself."

Thus he opened, pausing there to resume a moment later. "I take this opportunity of announcing to you that I am about to marry. It is known that I have been a priest, a capuchin. I should therefore lay before you the motives that have urged me to this resolve. As a legislator I have thought that it was my duty to set an example in all the virtues. It has been made a reproach against me that the love of women has played too large a part in my life, and I have come to perceive that I can best silence that calumny by taking the wife that the law accords to me. The woman I am to marry is of recent acquaintance. Brought up like the women of her country in the greatest reserve, she has been screened from the eyes of strangers. I do not pretend where she is concerned to be in love with anything beyond her virtue, her talents and her patriotism. And it is the reputation of these gifts in myself which have discovered for me the road to her affections."

He proceeded to add that no priest should soil his nuptials, or any superstitious ceremonies defile them, and thereby showed how well he knew his audience. For if the declaration brought no more than a murmur of applause from his fellow-legislators it produced a thunder of acclamation from the rabble in the galleries.

Thereafter he passed to matters of business so slender that they revealed themselves for the pretext and not the reason of his presence in the tribune.

André-Louis had listened to him in anger and contempt. Filled with pitying concern for Léopoldine, he was at this moment

more intent that his India-Company scheme should result in her deliverance than in the restoration of the Bourbons.

Chabot's place in the tribune was taken by Julien, that other scoundrelly apostate, and André-Louis leaned forward eagerly to hear the attack he was to deliver against the India Company, the burning phrases with which André-Louis himself had supplied this puppet. Julien, however, in concert with Delaunay, had improved upon the original plan. His present address resolved itself into one of those flamboyant exhibitions of logorrhea on the subject of virtue and purity in private and in public life, to which members of the Convention were in these days becoming more and more addicted. It was in the course of this, and no more than in passing, that he alluded to the India Company, as one of those organizations abusing the shelter of the State in which it flourished and turning that shelter to purposes not always beneficial to the State itself.

The allusion brought a sudden attentive stillness to an assembly which hitherto had been a little restless. Somewhere a voice challenged him to be more precise, declared that if he had charges to bring he should bring them specifically, and not by innuendo.

"The reproof is just," said Julien with perfect composure. "When I began to speak I had no intention of touching upon this, or else I should have armed myself with the details necessary for a full exposure of an abuse that must be within the knowledge of many of you. For it can be no secret to those of you who are zealous and watchful that the India Company advanced considerable sums of money to the heretofore King, whereby the deliverance of France from the odious rule of despotism was materially retarded."

His allusion to their watchfulness and zeal was a cunning gag in their mouths. Which of these deputies, by contradicting him or by demanding instantly the evidential details, would betray himself as without zeal and vigilance? Not one, as he well knew. And he left the matter there.

When later Bazire, who had also been taken by surprise, asked him if, indeed, he were in a position to prove what he had said, Julien smiled his sour, cynical smile and shrugged.

"What do proofs matter? The price of the stock will show to-morrow whether my shaft has gone home."

That his shaft had indeed gone home there could be no doubt two days later, by when the stock of the India Company had fallen from 1,500 to 600 francs. Already there was panic among the stockholders.

The next move was made a week later, and it came from Delaunay.

He pretended in the speech with which he electrified the Convention, that as a result of the allegations against the *Compagnie des Indes* which his confrère Julien of Toulouse had let fall in that place, he had been looking into the affairs of the Company, and what he discovered in them had appalled him. From this he passed to a fulminating denunciation of the fraud which the Company had practised in evading a tax justly imposed by the Nation. To defraud the Republic of moneys due to her, was to deprive her of her life's blood. Delaunay did not hesitate to describe as a sacrilege the defalcations of which the India Company was guilty.

The term was received with applause. On Robespierre's atrabilious countenance the tiger-cat grin was observed to spread as if in commendation.

Then, even as he had wrought up their passions, Delaunay now chilled them again by the motion he put forward. He proposed to dissolve the India Company, placing her directors under the obligation of proceeding to the liquidation of her affairs.

So inadequate to the crime was the proposed punishment that the Convention, after a gasp of surprise that was almost of anger, broke into a babble of discussion. The president rang his bell for silence, and Fabre d'Englantine was seen to be ascending the tribune to voice the general feeling.

He moved deliberately, a man slightly above middle height, of graceful build and careful attire. He had been many things in turn: actor, author, poetaster, painter, composer, thief, murderer, blackguard, and gaolbird. In every part assumed, however, the histrion had predominated, and still unmistakably histrionic were his movements, speech and gestures now, that by histrionic arts he had won to a position of eminence in this grotesque parliament. Those very arts served to make him popular with the masses whose sympathies are so easily captured by externals.

The man, however, was not without ability, and in his sonorous, slightly affected voice he displayed now the prompt grasp of affairs of which his mind was capable.

He began by complimenting Delaunay upon his diligence in unveiling the turpitude of the India Company; but deplored the inadequacy of the motion with which Delaunay proposed to deal with it.

"If the Company's administrators are to be left in charge of

the Company's liquidation, they are supplied with the means of indefinitely perpetuating it."

Delaunay, like André-Louis who had dictated those very terms, was well aware of this, and awaiting precisely such an objection. Had no one else voiced it, the task would have fallen to Bazire, that other member of this conspiracy. It was a little disconcerting that one who was not in the plot should intervene at this point. But it could not, after all, be serious in its consequences; because they could never have hoped to pack the commission entirely.

Meanwhile Fabre, warming to his subject was becoming more and more inexorable. He professed astonishment that Delaunay should have demanded anything less than the total and immediate extinction of the Company. No measures could be too strong against such a pack of scoundrels. He demanded that the property of these delinquents should immediately be impounded.

This was pushing matters a little further than the conspirators had reckoned. But opinions in the assembly were soon shown to be divided; the Representative Cambon expressed the view that Fabre's demands were too intransigent; that they would be productive of a disorganization in the world of commerce, such as could not ultimately be to the advantage of the Nation. Others followed him, each anxious to parade the purity of his patriotism and earning the applause of the gallery, and the debate might have gone on for ever had not at last Robespierre risen in his place to set a term to it.

Long since departed were the days when men sighed and yawned to behold the mincing Representative from Arras preparing to address the assembly in his dull, monotonous voice. The power that he had become, and for which so much was due to his young ally Saint-Just, was apparent in the almost awed silence that fell upon the assembly immediately upon his rising. Even the ribalds in the gallery who had emancipated themselves from all respect of persons seemed now to hold their breath before that slight, frail, figure. He was dressed with a care that was almost effeminate, in a close sky-blue frock over a striped satin waistcoat. Below this he wore black satin smalls, silk stockings, and buckled shoes whose heels were built up so as to increase his stature. His head emerged from a snowy, elaborately-tied cravat, the hair carefully dressed and powdered.

He stood a moment in silence, his horn-rimmed spectacles pushed up on to his forehead, his myopic eyes peering forth from that lean, pallid countenance with its curiously tip-tilted nose and wide, almost lipless mouth that was ever set in a tiger-cat grin.

Then the dull, unimpressive voice droned forth. He desired that the counsel of Fabre should be given weight. But this only after due investigation should have confirmed the charges made. For the rest, the matter was not one for the great body of the Convention but for a commission which he desired should be formed at once, not only to investigate but to decree the measures to be taken.

With that, cold and impassive as he had risen, he resumed his seat. His fiat had gone forth. These were not days in which any man in France would dare to call it in question, unless it were that fearless cyclops Danton, who was still absent, honeymooning at Arcis-sur-Aube. Robespierre had demanded that a commission be formed.

This was Chabot's clue. It had been concerted that the demand should come from Delaunay. That it came from a higher authority was all the better. Chabot rose from his seat on Robespierre's immediate left to support the wish expressed by his august leader, and to propose that Delaunay himself should be included in the commission. His real object was thus to connect himself with the business so that he too might be named. This followed easily and naturally. Beyond that, however, things did not quite run the prescribed course. It had been arranged that Julien and Bazire should name each other for service on that commission, and as five members would compose it, thus there would have been an overwhelming preponderance of these in the financial conspiracy.

Fabre's intervention, however, had brought him into prominence, and his nomination was inevitable. So, too, was Cambon's, who had spoken to mitigate the harshness of Fabre. To these was added Ramel, who had also intervened in the debate, and upon that, at last, the matter was closed.

That evening the conspirators, a little dismayed by the turn of events, a little dubious now of the result, foregathered in the Rue de Ménars to take counsel with André-Louis.

He was out of temper and caustic, and he lashed Bazire and Julien for having neglected to make an opportunity for themselves in the course of the debate. It would have been especially easy for Julien to have got himself appointed to the commission, considering that he was already associated in the mind of the assembly with the affairs of the India Company.

"It was Fabre who sent things awry," Julien excused himself.

De Batz interposed. "Why recriminate? What does it matter? Does any man believe in the incorruptibility of that mummer? Do you know his history? Bah! You can have his

soul for a hundred thousand francs." He pulled a bundle of assignats from a drawer of the secretaire. "Here, Chabot! Buy him with that. Thus, whatever Cambon and Ramel may wish, you will be sure of a majority on your commission."

He had acted upon a sudden inspiration. And when those four traffickers in their mandate had taken their departure, he laughed deep in his throat as he looked at André-Louis.

"Thus things fall out even better than you designed. To entangle Fabre d'Englantine in the business as well as the others was more than I had hoped just yet! He's worth as much as Julien, Delaunay and Bazire all added together. The gods fight on our side André-Louis, as we might have known they would; for the gods are all aristocrats."

Rumours that the Compagnie des Indes was about to be extinguished by order of the Convention spread immediate panic among the stockholders. Within twenty-four hours the shares had fallen even below the level last prognosticated by Delaunay. The miracle was that there should be buyers for them at any price. And yet buyers there were. At one twentieth of their real value, the shares, so fearfully cast upon the market were instantly absorbed.

Benoît, the Angevin banker, was known to be the buyer. He was derided by his financial colleagues for his pains. He was denounced to his face as mad to pay even the vilest price for paper whose only purpose hereafter could be to wrap up bread. But Benoît remained unperturbed.

"What would you? I am a gambler. I take my chances. The commission has yet to decide the fate of the Company. If the decision is utterly ruinous to it, my loss will be none so heavy. If it is otherwise I shall have made a fortune."

He bought of course for Delaunay, Julien and Bazire. Chabot at the last moment lacked the necessary courage. Delaunay urged him to invest the half of the hundred thousand francs he had received for supporting the scheme. But Chabot was fearful of losing it. In the end, he might not prevail with Fabre; and if Fabre remained uncorrupted all would be lost. Already Fabre's intervention had made it impossible to lay alternative decrees before the directors of the India Company and blackmail them into buying the decree that would save them from destruction.

Delaunay reported the matter to André-Louis. André-Louis dealt with it summarily. Chabot must be implicated neck-deep, inextricably, and for this some speculation on his

part was of the first importance. But this was not what André-Louis said.

What he said was: "Chabot must stand to profit by the preservation of the Company or else he will not work for it. His cowardice will make him take the easier road, and rest content with his hundred thousand francs. If he will not buy shares, himself, we must buy them for him." He thrust upon Delaunay a wad of assignats. "Let Benoît buy him twenty-thousand francs' worth, and take them to him. Point out to him that on the day when the India Company's credit is clear of this cloud, those shares will be worth half a million. To resist that it would be necessary that Chabot should not be human. And God knows he's so human as to be almost bestial."

Chabot's resistance did not prove insuperable. The prospect of the half-million was a persuasion not only to accept but also to set about the seduction of Fabre d'Englantine.

Ten days passed, and still the commission had not sat. It was time to get to work. Chabot sought Fabre, to learn when it would please him to attend to the matter. Fabre displayed indifference. "I will suit my convenience to your own as far as I am able."

"I will consult the others, and send you word," Chabot replied.

The others whom he consulted were Delaunay, Julien and Bazire, of whom only the first had any official concern in the matter. Unofficially, however, their concern was a common one.

"You may act when you please," Julien informed him. "And the sooner the better. We have bought to the limit of our resources."

So they had, and another who had bought heavily, informed by his friend Delaunay of the inner movement in this business, was Benoît, himself, for his own account. The extent of his purchases gave him a more than ordinarily keen interest in the manipulation, and out of this it presently followed that he began to seek for a reason why de Batz and Moreau, whom he knew for the moving spirits in the scheme, should themselves have abstained from purchasing, neglecting so rare an opportunity of easy fortune. Benoît made exhaustive inquiries. Positively neither de Batz nor Moreau had bought a single share. What the devil was the meaning of it?

He tackled de Batz with some such question at the very first opportunity. De Batz was off his guard, and did not sufficiently weigh his reply.

"It's a speculation. I do not speculate. I trade along lines that are secure."

"But then, why the devil did you trouble to work out this scheme?"

And de Batz still more incautiously replied: "I did not. It is Moreau's scheme."

"Ah! Then why has Moreau not bought?"

De Batz affected innocence. "Has he not? Ha! Curious!" And he changed the subject.

Benoît agreed with him in his heart that it was curious. Infernally curious. So curious that he must find the explanation of it. Since he could seek it nowhere else, he sought it of André-Louis himself upon the morrow. Fear of heavy pecuniary loss can spur some men as strongly as the fear of loss of life itself, and Benoît, whose whole existence had been dedicated to the service of Mammon, was of these. So it was a truculent, combative, dangerous Benoît who descended next morning upon André-Louis. He found the young man alone in the Rue de Ménars.

Benoît came straight to the point. André-Louis, standing before him in the Baron's gay salon, heard him with an astonishment of which he betrayed no faintest sign. His lean, keen countenance remained rigid as a mask. If before he answered in words he uttered a short laugh, yet it was a laugh that told Benoît nothing.

"I do not know that I owe you any explanation. But I'll gratify your curiosity. I do not like the commission that has been appointed. If Fabre d'Englantine keeps of the same mind as that in which he addressed the Convention on this subject, the India Company will be extinguished."

"Then why," demanded the portly banker, his countenance more florid than usual this morning, his little eyes narrowed to observe the other's unrevealing countenance, "why did you send Fabre a hundred thousand francs to change his mind? Why do you spend such a sum if you have no interest to speculate on the result?"

"Since when, Benoît, have I been accountable to you for what I choose to do? What is your right to question me?"

"My right? God of God! I have embarked two hundred and fifty thousand francs upon this scheme of yours. . . ."

"Of mine?"

"Ay, of yours. Don't waste time in denying it. I know what I know."

"You know too much, Benoît."

"For your safety, you mean?"

"No, Benoît. For your own." And smoothly though the words were spoken, there was a cold, steely edge to them that made the banker suddenly apprehensive.

André-Louis was watching him with glittering eyes. Slowly, incisively, letting his words fall like drops of icy water, André-Louis asked a question that voiced the very threat already trembling on the banker's lips. "Will you tell the Revolutionary Tribunal that this piece of chicanery concerned with the India Company is a thing of my invention, done at my instigation? Will you?"

"And if I did?"

The glittering eyes never left his own. They held his glance in a singular magnetic fascination.

"What is your evidence? Who are your witnesses? A group of venal rascals who traffick in their mandate, who abuse their position in the State, to grow rich by blackmail and by fraudulent speculation. Yes, fraudulent, Benoît, and fraudulent in the grossest manner. Will the word of these rogues, these thieves—for it is upon their word that you have it that this scheme is mine—destroy a man whose hands are clean, who cannot be shown to have purchased a single share in the India Company? Or will it destroy a man like you, who, taking advantage of the fraud, has invested a quarter of a million in the Company's stock? Which do you think, Benoît?" Again came that short, toneless laugh. "And there you have the answer that you sought. Now you know precisely why I have neglected, as you say, this opportunity to make a fortune."

Benoît, his face the colour of clay, his jaw fallen, his breathing shortened, stood there and trembled. He had his answer indeed.

"My God!" he groaned. "What game do you play here?"

André-Louis advanced upon him. He set a hand upon the banker's fleshly shoulder in its gay green coat.

"Benoît," he said quietly, "you have the reputation—it is whispered of you, no more—of being a safe man. But not all those whom you have served, not if each were as influential as Robespierre himself, could keep you safe if this were known. Remember that, Benoît. I, too, am a safe man. Take comfort in the thought. Keep faith with me, and I'll keep faith with you. Keep faith with me, and you may yet keep your head whatever heads may fall. Break it, mention this matter to a single soul and be sure that Charlot will make your toilet for you within forty-eight hours. And now that we understand each other suppose that we talk of other things."

Benôit departed, enlightened and yet in darkness. Something was moving here, something deep, dangerous and portentous of which even knowledge might be perilous. Yet that knowledge he would seek, but not until he had made himself safe by ridding himself of the evidences of his participation in the India Company business. He would sell his stock at once, content at need to suffer a loss where by waiting he might clear a colossal profit. Then, being rid of that dangerous burden with nothing on his hands to betray him, he could laugh at the threat which imposed silence. But the stock was impossible to sell at any price by now, since all those who were in the secret had already purchased to the limit of their available resources.

CHAPTER XXXI

GERMINATION

THE *ci-devant* Chevalier de Saint-Just, that flaming torch of patriotism and republican integrity, was about to depart on a mission of importance to Strasbourg, where a strong hand was just then required. No stronger hand could the party of the Mountain supply than that of this elegant, fiercely eloquent, ardently zealous young idealist. Such was the reputation into which he had come. Engrossed in national work, he was accounted of an asceticism unusual in his age, of a purity of life that was a model to mankind, and of an incorruptibility that rendered him a fit lieutenant to Robespierre, that Great Incorruptible. His youth—he was scarcely more than a boy—his well-knit, graceful figure, his handsome face with the golden curls clustering thickly about his smooth white brow, and his indubitable talents had raised him by the autumn of '93 to the position of a popular idol. If he had contrived to place Robespierre supreme, as the first man in France, he had at the same time not been neglectful of himself. With his talents, remorselessness and ambition, it is possible that he was content to play the acolyte; it is equally possible that he dreamed of ultimately wresting to himself the office of high-priest in the republican temple.

His last act in the Convention before departing on that Strasbourg mission had served to increase his popularity. He had moved that decree for the confiscation of all foreign property, the foreshadowing of which had led to the tightening of the relations between Chabot and the Freys. And he had moved it in an address which was a challenge of France to the world in arms against her. Her frontiers were being violated by the mercenaries of the despots ; her blood was being shed in the sacred cause of freedom ; whilst the vile agents of Pitt and Coburg were sapping her strength, by tapping the veins of her commercial and social life. They must strike the enemy wherever he was to be met. They must strike him here in their midst no less than on the frontiers. Let all foreign property in France be placed under seal.

That motion was carried. The ardent terms in which it had been advocated were reported, circulated and extolled by every true son of France.

Fortunately for the Freys, Chabot was already married to their sister. Some days before, poor little Léopoldine had submitted to the horrible ordeal, had been immolated by her brothers on the foul altar of Mammon. The worthless assignment they had made rendered their property immune from the decreed confiscation. Chabot, the unclean, licentious ex-capuchin, turned fop, was installed in the handsome apartments on the first floor of the Freys' house, and thus to be regarded as its inquiline.

The delectable Poldine, as he now called her, the little partridge whose maiden plumpness had so whetted his lascivious appetite, was now his own possession, and her dowry was on a scale that in itself should make him rich, had made him rich already. And even this dowry had ceased to signify. Soon now he would count his wealth from other sources in hundreds of thousands, for with re-established confidence the stock of the India Company must soar rapidly back towards the high figure from which it had so precipitatedly tumbled. Wealth, greatness and honours awaited François Chabot. Very clearly his eyes perceived the golden glow on his horizon. Robespierre had been a fool to be afraid of money, to neglect opportunities to enrich himself which his position gave him. For money, as Chabot had so lately discovered, was the stoutest staff upon which a man could lean. With it, before all was done, he would try a fall with Robespierre himself, and Robespierre, caught without any golden panoply about him, should go down to make way for François Chabot.

Meanwhile he would neglect no opportunity of focussing the

popular attention. He would keep all eyes upon himself, so that his republican ardour might dazzle the beholders. With this in view he was of those who in an impassioned speech demanded the trial too long delayed of the infamous Austrian woman, that wicked Messalina the Widow Capet.

The Convention yielded promptly. It dared do no other even if it had wished. Already popular feeling against this woman had made it prudent to abandon the secret negotiations with Austria for the exchange of prisoners, by which she would have been delivered. The execution of the King had been in the nature of a dangerous experiment. In decreeing it the Convention had staked its existence. It would stake that existence now, and undoubtedly lose it if it hesitated in dealing mercilessly with this woman to whom so many national calamities were attributed.

And so at three o'clock in the morning on the 2nd of October, the unfortunate widow of Louis XVI was conveyed in a closed carriage, faced by two municipals to guard her, from the prison of the Temple to the guillotine's antechamber, the Conciergerie.

When it was known on the morrow, André-Louis was oddly bitter. He smiled sourly upon de Batz, who sat crushed with horror.

"And so," he said slowly, "the sacrifice of poor little Léopoldine has been in vain. It has not sufficed, after all, to propitiate your dreadful gods. They must have a queen in holocaust."

The Baron leapt up with flaming eyes. "Do you mock?"

André-Louis shook his head. "I do not mock. I view the ruin, the futile ruin of a sweet young life. It was to save a queen, you said. I told you that no good would come of it."

Livid, de Batz swung away from him. "I spoke of more than the Queen. But why argue? You have moved too slowly with your infernal caution."

"That is unjust. I was spurred to swiftest movement in the hope of precipitating the avalanche in time to save Léopoldine."

"Léopoldine! Léopoldine! Can you think of nothing else? Not even the fate of the Queen of France can eclipse her from your thoughts. What do I care for all the Léopoldines in the world when that anointed head may fall unless I can work a miracle? And that fat fool at Hamm will mock again; will call me a Gascon and a boaster."

"Does that matter? Is your vanity to be concerned?"

"It is a question of my honour," de Batz fiercely retorted.

Thereafter for a week he scarcely ate or slept, and was seldom at his lodging in the Rue-de-Ménars. He scoured the city. He

hunted out his army of loyal associates. He held conferences, propounded plans, each more reckless than the other for the deliverance of the unhappy Queen. Rougeville, one of his associates, even claimed thereafter to have penetrated the Conciergerie and to have spoken with her Majesty in an attempt to prepare the ground for an evasion. But all was vain. There was not even the forlorn hope of delivering her by some such desperate attempt on the road to the Place de la Revolution as that by which nine months ago he had proposed to save the King. Those were early days, and after all the King had still some friends even among the Republicans, whereas the Queen, thanks to the infamous propaganda that had been steadily at work, was universally execrated.

That propaganda was to continue industrious to the end. There are no limits to the invention by which men seek to justify the wrong they do. Hitherto they had been content to brand this poor tarnished queen as a Messalina. But not even this was enough for the foul mind of Hébert.

Her trial, lasting two days, had closed with the death sentence at four o'clock on the morning of Wednesday the 16th October. Some hours later she set out in the tumbril, dressed all in white, her hands pinioned behind her. From the mob-cap with which she was coiffed escaped the ragged ends of the grey hair rudely cropped by the executioner's valet in the course of the last toilet. But she sat erect, disdainful, her heavy Austrian lip protruding in scorn of the loathly rabble that booed her as she passed to her death.

It was an imposing last procession. All Paris was under arms. The drums rolled. Thirty thousand troops of foot and horse had turned out, and lined the route. Cannon was mounted at every commanding point. Did she contrast it with that other procession, twenty-three years ago, in which as the lovely young archduchess of fifteen she had first come among these people who then, as now, and yet in what different sentiment had yelled themselves hoarse at sight of her?

De Batz, a man anguished and almost demented, was in the crowd to hear the shouts of "Death to tyrants! Live the Republic!" which greeted the fall of that royal head.

Disordered in mind, as in appearance, he came back to the Rue-de-Ménars and to André-Louis who had abstained from going forth that day. But not on that account had he remained either ignorant of or indifferent to what was taking place. He rose as de Batz entered.

"So. It is finished," he said quietly.

Out of the Baron's livid face a pair of flaming, blood-injected eyes regarded him in fury.

"Finished? No. It is about to begin. What you have heard from here was but the overture. It is time to ring up the curtain. Time to make an end."

His self-control had completely left him. He had the air of a drunkard or a madman, and he raved like one. He reviled all things, beginning with himself and ending with the people. It shamed him, he declared, that the same blood should run in his veins as in the veins of these tigers. They were vile as no people in the world ever had been or ever could be vile. They were inhuman, bestial imbeciles. But they should soon be brought to their senses. Even to such sub-human wits as theirs the corruption of their masters in the Convention should be made apparent. Their passions, so easily inflamed, should be inflamed indeed, so as to consume the evil satyrs who were responsible for this horror. All of these, he swore, should go the way the Queen had gone that morning.

If André-Louis did not share his stormy emotions, he certainly shared his resolve. Because he remained cold and self-contained, he was in fact, as he had always been as he would be to the end, the deadlier of the two.

There followed days of watchful waiting for the moment to ring up the curtain on the drama of which he had so craftily prepared the scenario.

First came, less than a fortnight later, the mockery of a trial of the twenty-two Girondins, who had languished in prison since last June. Robespierre judged that the hour for this had struck. It would drive home the assertion that the party of the Mountain, of which he was the undisputed head, was now the paramount party in the State. Their execution followed: a wholesale butchery this, providing in the Place de la Revolution a spectacle of blood on a scale not yet witnessed there.

Yet it was a spectacle which restored to de Batz something of his old remorseless spirit. Almost he smiled even as, with a sigh, he said: "Poor devils! All young, all able! But even as for their own advancement they did not hesitate to murder the King, so must their own murder be approved by all monarchists since it must advance the cause of the monarchy. Saturn-like the Convention begins to devour its own children. It is upon this that we have depended. Let the work thus begun be pushed forward ruthlessly, until, when it is seen in the departments that the representatives themselves are being guillotined, none will be found to brave the danger of replacing them, and the

Convention will be reduced to a handful of contemptible fellows to be used or to be brushed aside." In a breath he added: "Is the business of the India Company ripe yet?"

"It is ripening fast," André-Louis informed him. Already some days previously the commission had pronounced, upon the vote of the majority, that the extinction of the Company could not be countenanced, since it would be against the national interest. That finding, published unostentatiously, was already abroad, and confidence was being restored. "The stock is rising again daily. Whether our friends have taken their profits or not scarcely matters. They have certainly made them. I am preparing now a memorial for some representative or other ambitious enough to bell the cat."

"Whom have you in mind?"

"Philippeaux. There's a crude honesty about him. Also, he is a moderate, and therefore a natural enemy of the extremist Chabot. I have sounded him in a casual way. I pointed out to him how odd a thing it is that so many members of the Convention have latterly become men of property. I asked him innocently what possible explanation there could be for this. He became angry. Used the word calumny; voiced a suspicion that rumours indicated the existence of a plot to bring the Convention into discredit."

"That was shrewd enough," said de Batz.

"I promised him particulars. I am preparing them."

He prepared them so well that the Representative Philippeaux, convinced, mounted the tribune of the Convention to cast a bombshell into the assembly. This happened on a November morning a week later, and for the moment put an end to the discussion of abstract questions which had been occupying so much time since Danton's return from his uxurious retirement. The murder of the Girondins had been the immediate cause of his reappearance. That and the summons from his friend Desmoulins, who began to dread the daily increasing ascendancy of Robespierre. Danton, the man chiefly responsible for the butchery of the 10th of August, when the gutters had run with blood, was there now to preach in his powerful voice a gospel of moderation.

It startled de Batz, who accounted the movement premature. At the same time, he perceived in it the beginnings of a counter-revolutionary tendency and it confirmed the opinion he had long held that when the time to use him came he would find in Danton the man to play in France the part that Monk had played in England.

And then, even whilst these things were engaging the Baron's attention, this was suddenly diverted to more immediate matters by the speech of Philippeaux. The curtain was raised, indeed; the drama for which there had been such long and laborious preparation was at last about to commence.

CHAPTER XXXII

UNMASKED

A BIG, heavy man this Philippeaux, with a ponderous voice that came sluggishly but impressively forth. A voice that compelled attention if it did not charm.

The unconscious puppet of André-Louis Moreau, he uttered words which he believed to be his own to express sentiments which were also his. Scarcely aware of it, so craftily had André-Louis used him, he repeated the very phrases with which André-Louis, in a magnificent assumption of republican zeal, had almost deafened him the day before.

"Let the mask of charlatanism fall!" had been André-Louis' fierce apostrophe, and Philippeaux's fancy, captured by the image had not scrupled to appropriate it for his own.

"Let the mask of charlatanism fall!" was now the opening cry with which he startled the Convention. "Let virtue stand forth naked, so that the people may behold her. Let the people know that those who proclaim themselves the friends of the people are indeed labouring for the people's welfare. And let us begin by being rigorous with ourselves."

He paused there, and then, to the gaping assembly which so far had understood nothing, he flung his terrible gage of battle.

"I demand that every member of the Convention shall declare within one week from to-day what was the extent of his fortune before the Revolution. If this has since increased, the extent of the increase shall be indicated and the means by which it has been brought about. I move a decree under which any member of the Convention who shall not have satisfied this demand within the appointed time shall be declared a traitor to his country."

If the majority of the Convention heard him unmoved by any panic, yet there was a considerable minority to whom Philippeaux's motion brought the icy touch of fear. For many there were who had grown wealthy in ways which it could not suit them to disclose. Of all these none were more deeply stricken than the members of that little group responsible for the India Company manipulation. Chabot, Delaunay, Bazire and Julien were swept by terror. Julien, the shrewdest of them all, and possibly the greatest rascal, considered instant flight. He perceived that all was lost ; saw clearly the penalty that must wait upon revelation. He was grateful that Philippeaux gave them a week in which to render their accounts. Within that week, Julien would see to it that he was beyond the reach of the talons of the law. Delaunay remained stolid after the first shock. He was as deliberate of mental as of physical movement. He required time in which to consider this thing, to study its every side. Meanwhile he would jump at no conclusions. Bazire had the quality of courage. He would make no weak surrender. He would fight this matter as long as he had breath. Chabot's instinct, too, was to fight. But in him the instinct sprang from the opposite cause. It sprang from fear. His was the instinct of the animal at bay. And frenziedly, like an animal at bay, without thought or calculation, he was fighting presently in the tribune, recklessly combating the motion of Philippeaux.

Hardly ever had he spoken upon any theme without founding his arguments upon a denunciation. Always for Chabot was there someone to denounce, someone to hound to trial and the scaffold. It was as the arch-denouncer that his popularity was established. So now. Pale, breathless, a little wild of eye and manner, he denounced.

"Counter-revolutionaries are at work to sow dissension in the Convention, to bring its members under unjust suspicion." Thus he began, little suspecting how true was what he said. "Who has told you, citizens, that these counter-revolutionaries do not aim at sending you to the scaffold ? It has been whispered to me, but until this moment I have not believed it, that we are to be taken in turn. One to-day, Danton to-morrow : after him Billaud-Varennès ; they will end at Robespierre himself." Thus recklessly, yet oddly accurate without suspecting it, he named names, hoping perhaps to range those whom he mentioned on his side. "Who has told you that it is not the aim of these traitors to solicit upon forged evidence a decree of accusation against the foremost patriots here ?"

Let him throw into his rhetorical questions all the force of

which he was capable, he remained conscious that he stirred the main body of his audience below to no interest, whilst above him in the galleries there was a dull muttering, that reminded him of the first distant rumblings of thunder. Was the storm about to break about his head? Had he come so far, merely to end like this? His terror deepened. He clutched the ledge of the tribune to support himself. He stood on tiptoe in some vague hope of dominating by an increase of height. He moistened his dry lips with his tongue, and began again.

But he was no longer the great denouncer. He was suddenly become a suppliant. And his supplication, in accents such as none had yet heard from the truculent little ex-capuchin's lips, was that the Convention should never admit a decree which might strike a single one of its members before he had been heard.

A voice interrupted him "And the Girondins, Chabot? Were they heard?"

His staring wild eyes sought the speaker among the serried ranks of the legislators sitting below him. His wits became paralysed. He had no answer to that interpellation. It was as if the blood of the murdered Girondins rose up to choke him.

Then the words that he might have uttered came in another voice, a steady, dominant voice. It was the voice of Bazire, the man who had kept his courage, and with his courage his wits. He had risen in his place.

"The Girondins," he declared firmly, "were condemned by public opinion. There is no parallel. Here and now it is pretended upon the vaguest charges to direct an attack against true friends of liberty. I support the proposal of Chabot. I demand that it be adopted."

There was one who opposed him, one who, whilst agreeing that a deputy should be heard before being charged, yet demanded that any who attempted to evade the proposed decree should be declared outside the law.

Bazire, however, was equal even to this. "No sentence can be passed upon one who evades accusation. Such a man would merely be acting upon an elementary instinct of liberty. When the Girondins decreed Marat's arrest, Marat went into hiding. Dares any man to blame the conduct of that great hero?"

Of course none dared. And then Julien, taking courage from the audacity of his confederate, added a word that brought the matter to an end.

"A private individual who evades accusation is not outlawed on that account. Will you, then, make sterner laws for the representatives of the people than for private individuals?"

A Convention in which too many had cause to desire no such investigation as Philippeaux demanded was glad to fasten upon the logic of Julien's question as a means of closing the debate. The principle of Chabot's proposal was accepted, and the little group of swindlers associated with him breathed freely again.

It looked, indeed, as if Chabot had triumphed. But the man who had inspired Philippeaux was at hand to inspire others. From the gallery André-Louis had listened and observed. That evening he might have been seen dining at Fevrier's with an out-at-elbow lawyer named Dufourny, who enjoyed a reputation for advanced patriotism and was a prominent figure in the Jacobin Club.

On the following evening the two were again to be seen together, this time in the Jacobin Club, itself ; and there Dufourny raised his voice against the conduct yesterday of Chabot and Bazire in their opposition to Philippeaux, and to invite the Jacobins to demand of the Convention a strict examination of the motives of those two representatives.

The proposal was received with an applause which in itself revealed the extent to which suspicion of Chabot, until yesterday so doimnantly popular a figure, had already undermined his position.

Chabot, who was present, felt his knees knocking together in their new satin breeches. He could have wept to think how easily he had been caught in that snare of money. But there was worse to come. Dufourny had but opened the floodgates. The torrent was yet to roll forth.

Yielding to counsels of despair, Chabot conquered his terror so far as to ascend the tribune there to render his explanations.

He began again in his old denunciatory terms. He spoke of treason and conspiracy and of the agents of Pitt and Coburg. But for once the phrases with which he had been wont to rivet the attention of the vulgar earned him only derision. He was interrupted, he was mocked, he was ordered to speak to the point, to tell them not of Pitt and Coburg, but of himself. And then, when under that volley of sarcasm, for which no past experience had prepared him, he faltered, sweated, stammered, and finally turned in defeat to descend from the tribune, a woman's voice made his blood run cold with her shrill cry :

"To the guillotine !"

That terrible apostrophe was taken up on every side until the vaulted hall rang with it.

It arrested his descent. Leaden-hued of face he stood, and

raised his clenched hand above his head. Because it was seen that he was about to speak the clamours fell silent.

In a cracked voice, oddly unlike his usual smooth, oily accents, he screamed at them: "In despite of my enemies, in despite of revolutionary women, it shall come to be recognized that I am the saviour of the public weal!"

With that vague assertion he stumbled down the steps on knees that were turned to water under him.

He collapsed weakly on a bench against the wall near the tribune, conscious only of glances that were unfriendly and mocking, turned upon him who yesterday had seemed to himself a demi-god.

Dufourny leapt to replace him in the tribune.

"He dares to call himself the saviour of the public weal! He dares! This man who has braved public opinion by marrying a foreigner, an Austrian!"

Chabot reared his head at that. This was an attack from a fresh quarter, on fresh grounds. Did the old one not suffice? Was there a plot here to destroy him? Looking wildly round, his glance met the dark eyes of André-Louis Moreau, regarding him curiously. And something in that glance went through him like a sword of ice. What was Moreau doing here? And what had he been doing in company with that scoundrel Dufourny? He groped in vagueness. Then, abandoned that to listen to the damning words that Dufourny was pouring forth.

"What effrontery, what contempt for the people and for popular feeling in the very hour chosen by Chabot for such a marriage! He celebrates it at a time when Antoinette stood for her crimes before the Revolutionary Tribunal, when the nation, beset by the hirelings of foreign despots, was at the height of its execration of foreigners; when our brothers who are upon the frontiers have left us their widows, their sisters, their relatives to comfort and succour. It is in such a moment that Chabot contracts a wealthy marriage with an Austrian woman."

Execration answered and confirmed him. Dufourny paused until it had passed.

"A woman is a garment for a man. If such a garment was necessary for Chabot, he should have remembered that the nation had proscribed foreign materials. Before taking such a wife, a man should inform himself if those to whom she is related are not legitimately to be suspected of having bonds of interest with the enemies of France."

At this Chabot bounded to his feet. On this at least he could deliver a clear answer. He began to defend the Freys, to

speaking of Junius as a worthy member of this very club, a philosopher, a patriot, the first thinker in Europe, one who had made sacrifices in coming to live in the benign shadow of the Tree of Liberty.

"Sacrifices which enable him to reckon his wealth in millions," a voice interrupted him.

Even in the disordered state of his senses he fancied that he recognized the voice for that of André Louis Moreau. But he was given little time in which to reflect. The clamours thundered about him again. He was accused now of prevarication, of impudent falsehoods uttered to protect an Austrian Jew, a ghoul who battered on the calamities of the nation, an agent of Coburg's in their midst.

And to his offences against the nation was added now the accusation of an offence against humanity. Again it was Dufourny who voiced it, waiting for a moment of silence so that no syllable of it should be lost.

"Before this marriage of yours, Chabot, you had a companion, a mistress, a Frenchwoman, who has since become a mother. What have you done with her? Why did you abandon her, leaving her to starve, together with your child?"

At this a menace of violence from the women was added to the general execration. It was remembered against him that he had been a priest. The very apostasy, which hitherto had magnified him into a shining example of progressive republicanism, was discounted now as something done in the indulgence of a dissolute nature.

Under this formidable onslaught the ignoble spirit of this man, who had so callously procured the breaking of so many noble spirits, broke at last completely. He burst into tears, and with wild, lachrymose denunciations of those who now denounced him, he staggered forth from that club which had become for him a place of terrors.

He went home to the elegant apartments and the recently-acquired luxuries of the Rue d'Anjou, luxuries for which it now seemed that he was likely to pay with his neck, and as he went he asked himself what enemy was this who so suddenly and without warning had leapt at him out of the void to fasten upon his throat.

The Freys heard his story in dismay. He spared them nothing. But when he spoke of that secret, invisible enemy, the dismay of Junius was converted into contempt. Junius was a hard-headed, practical man of affairs. He had no patience with mere instinctive feelings and with a babble of ghostly

antagonism. He demanded substance, proofs, and fancied, being practical, that he discovered them for himself.

"Pish! A secret enemy! What secret enemy should you have? Is there some husband whose wife you have debauched? Someone you have swindled? Or the friend or relative of someone whom you have guillotined? Can you think of any such?"

Chabot could not. He had in his time been guilty of all these crimes and more. But he was not aware that he had left any avenger on his heels.

"Well, then! Well, then! Your secret enemy is simply the vulgar envy which any access of prosperity will provoke. Shall a man of your position, of your popularity—the greatest man in France next to Robespierre—be swept away by that mean sentiment? The Jacobins may storm, inflamed by this scoundrel Dufourny. But the Jacobins are not the People. It is the People, the sovereign People, who are the ultimate arbiters in France to-day. Make your appeal to them. They will not forsake you. Take courage, man."

He took it, under the vigorous drive of that undaunted Jew. In the night he considered his position and the course to be taken, and he reached a resolve before morning. He would go to Robespierre. The Incorruptible could not be indifferent to his fate. He was too valuable to the party of the Mountain, and a struggle lay ahead of that party.

There were rumours of strife to come, arising out of the discrepancy between Danton's views of policy and Robespierre's. Robespierre would need to rally all his friends about him for that contest. And of them all, with the possible exception of Saint-Just, who had been climbing so rapidly of late, none was more valuable than Chabot.

His confidence restored by this reflection and by the perception now of the tale he was to tell, he went off betimes to the Rue Saint Honoré and the house of the cabinet-maker Duplay, where the Incorruptible was lodged.

CHAPTER XXXIII

THE INCORRUPTIBLE

ACROSS a courtyard stacked with broad planks of cedar, walnut and mahogany, where wood-shavings curled and clung about

his ankles, and where a couple of young men were industriously sawing a baulk of timber, the Citizen-Representative Chabot gained the house and ascended the dark staircase to the first floor.

His knock was answered by Elizabeth Duplay, one of the two daughters of the cabinet-maker with whom Maximilien Robespierre was lodged, one of the two vestals who ministered to the arch-priest of the Republic. No breath of scandal had ever blown over these relations. If Robespierre feared money, he feared women more. Indeed, an aversion to women had always marked his nature, a curious aversion which upon occasion had found an expression almost feral.

The great Montagnard lived simply and was readily accessible. Moreover, Elizabeth Duplay had often opened to the Citizen-Representative Chabot, and he was well-known to her, although at the moment and in the uncertain light of the landing she had to look twice before she recognized under his preposterous finery one whom she had never seen other than red-bonneted and ill-clad, like a man of the people.

He was ushered into a fair room that overlooked the street, a room simple, austere, immaculate as the man who tenanted it. The windows were hung with curtains of Persian blue, softening and subduing the daylight, and there was about the sparse furniture, as about the man himself, a neat and elegant asceticism.

Robespierre stood before his writing-table, a slight, almost boyish, figure in a tight coat that was striped in two shades of blue, and all about him—evidences of his abnormal vanity and egotism—reproductions of himself served to decorate his shrine. Here it was a sketch by David; there the portrait in oils which had hung in the Salon two years ago; from the overmantel a bust of himself looked down upon the original, reproducing the meanness of the square face, the cruel spite that was never absent from the lips of that wide mouth, belying the humour to have been suspected from the tilt of his curious nose that was so wide at the root.

When Chabot entered, he was in the act of squeezing an orange into a broad cup. He suffered from an insufficiency of bile, and to excite it drank orange-juice continuously. To see who came, he thrust the horn-rimmed spectacles upwards on to his massive forehead, sparsely covered by the curls of his scrupulously dressed and powdered hair. His myopic green eyes peered across the room, and the set grin that never left his lips widened slightly in recognition.

Beyond that he made no welcoming movement. But having

set down the cup, and placed the orange hemisphere upon a plate beside its other half, he stood waiting for Chabot to speak. It was an ominous reception, which in itself informed Chabot of that which he most dreaded.

He closed the door and came forward. He did not strut this morning. He dragged his feet a little. Of the swaggering forward thrust of his incipient paunch which normally announced his aggressive self-sufficient nature there was little sign. He was pale, and blear-eyed. Even the Polichinelle nose that sprouted from that lamentably sloping forehead seemed to have shrunk overnight to less aggressive proportions. The coward latent in every bully had come to the surface. He had spent the wakeful night in tears, in lamentations of his fate, which he assigned to the malignity of others rather than to any fault in himself. He had played the hypocrite so long that it is possible that he deceived even himself, and that actually he believed at least some part of the tale with which he came to seek the assistance of the one man in France whose power might shield him.

"I disturb you early, Robespierre. But my duty requires it. I come to save the Republic. I hold the thread of the most dangerous conspiracy that has yet been organized for the ruin of Liberty."

For a long moment the green eyes considered him. They were ice-cold in their regard, and ice-cold was the voice in which at last the arch-priest of Liberty delivered himself.

"Why then, you must reveal it."

"Of course. But to do this it is necessary that I should continue to associate with the conspirators. I have pretended to be one with them so that I might penetrate their designs. I have pretended to yield to the temptation of sharing in their plunder, so that I might discover the extent of their aims. I begin to perceive that these are counter-revolutionary: that a terrible, and incredible conspiracy is at work; actively at work; and already widespread. It is in my power to have these men taken red-handed, the proofs upon them."

"No man could render a greater service to his country."

"Ha! You see that. You see that!"

"It leaps to the eye." If there was irony in the cold, level voice, it was too subtle for Chabot. He was beginning to take courage.

"It does. Of course it does."

"You must not hesitate, Chabot." And then he added: "You will have proofs. What are they?"

And now what the little scoundrel said was strictly true. He pulled out a packet of assignats.

"Here are a hundred thousand francs. They were handed to me as a bribe not to oppose certain financial projects of these scoundrels. If I had yielded to my natural impulse, which was to reject with horror this monstrous proposal and at once denounce the villains who made it, I must have missed the chance of sounding their design to its infamous depths. You see, Robespierre, how hard a choice was laid before me; what self-control I was forced to summon to my aid. But the thing has gone far enough. I scarcely dare let it go further lest I should myself come under suspicion. For the sake of my country, for the sake of the Republic which has never had a more loyal servant, I have placed myself in jeopardy. But I must clear this up. It is my intention at once to take this packet to the Committee of Public Safety and at the same time reveal the name of the traitors."

"Then why do you come to me? You are wasting valuable time. The Committee of Public Safety will certainly receive you with the cordiality and gratitude for which the occasion calls."

Chabot stood hesitating, uneasy, shifting on his feet.

"Make haste, my friend," the Incorruptible admonished him. "Make haste." He stepped aside from the table as he spoke, moving stork-like on his thin legs in their thin silk stockings above his preposterously high heels.

"Yes . . . but . . . name of a name! I don't want it supposed from my association with these vile conspirators that I am one of them."

"Why should it be? Who could suppose this of you?" But there was no warmth of conviction in that voice. Its tone remained dead-level. Its words were mechanical if they were not actually mocking.

"There are the appearances. All men are not as you, Robespierre. They have not your nice balance of judgment. They make hasty assumptions upon insufficient grounds. That is why I feel myself in need of some security."

"It is a question, you say, of saving your country. Can such a patriot as you are hesitate from personal considerations?"

"No." Chabot was vehement. He adopted something of his tribune-manner. "I am ready enough to die for my country. But I do not want to die under a stigma of guilt. I must think of my family: my mother and my sister. I do not want them to die of broken hearts, and it is what would happen to them."

Especially my sister. A fierce patriot my sister, who said to me once, not long ago : 'François, if ever it should happen that you should betray the cause of the People, I should be the first to plunge a dagger into your heart.'"

"The Roman spirit," was Robespierre's comment.

"Oh, a Roman of the Romans my sister."

Robespierre nodded. "You are fortunate in your family." He strutted back to the table, and once more took up the half-orange, and the cup, and resumed his squeezing, speaking coldly the while.

"Your alarm is surely idle. You have no cause to doubt that the Committee of Public Safety will co-operate with you in whatever measures may be necessary to discover this conspiracy."

Chabot turned cold. "To be sure. To be sure. But if I had some guarantee, if—

"You have," said the icy voice. "Your intentions are your guarantee. What better could you desire?"

"With you, no more. You know me, Robespierre. You, whose glance penetrates to the heart of things and of men, perceive my intentions clearly. But others may not weigh all the factors quite so scrupulously."

Robespierre set down the half-orange that was now squeezed to exhaustion. He took up the other half. Holding it to the rim of the cup, he paused, and his green eyes squarely encountered Chabot's uneasy glance.

"What do you want me to do?"

Promptly came Chabot's answer

"Help me to save the country Associate yourself with me in this glorious task worthy of your great patriotism. Join hands with me, so that together we may crush this hydra of treason. That is the task I offer you. A task whose fulfilment will cover you with glory."

But not even the fantastic vanity of Robespierre could tempt him to succumb to this appeal.

"I would not rob you of a single ray of the glory which belongs to you, Chabot. Besides, I am tidy in all my habits. I like a proper observance of the forms, and you are out of order here. You should not have come to me at all. Your place is before the Committee of Public Safety. Go to the Committee, then, without further waste of time." And the Incorruptible lowered his eyes to the task in hand, and began to squeeze the second half of his orange.

Chabot understood that he was dismissed. He was not sure that he was not condemned. He gulped in panic, and with his

panic was mixed a high measure of incredulity. To one who had been a capuchin, and who as a capuchin had listened to confessions, the stupidity and wickedness of the human heart should have brought no surprises. Yet surprised he was by the wickedness and stupidity which he now construed to be actuating Robespierre. Was it really possible that in his overweening conceit this pompous little dullard was underestimating the value to him of such a man as Chabot? Did the creature really think that he had climbed by his own merit and his own unaided effort to the high place he held? Did his vanity blind him to the fact that it was by association with such men as Chabot, Bazire and Saint-Just that he had been hoisted into his supremacy? And dared he withhold his protecting ægis now from one of these? Dared he allow him to be cast to the lions? Had he no thought for the weakening of his own position that must result from the loss of such a supporter as Chabot?

It was incredible. But, beholding him there so calmly squeezing his orange, and pressing the extruded pulp against the rim of his cup, Chabot could no longer doubt that however incredible the thing was true.

He mumbled words which Robespierre supposed to be of leave-taking. Actually it was a Latin tag: "*Quem Deus vult perdere. . .*" And on that he went out on feet uncertain as a drunkard's.

He repaired straight to the Tuileries, and into the presence of the Committee of Public Safety, five members of which were in session, Barère presiding. On the way he had collected his courage once more. He had but to think of the past, of the triumphs his eloquence had won, of the great man that he had become. It was unimaginable that he should not be believed.

He maintained his recovered confidence even when he stood before that terrible Committee, whose members, already fully informed through their ubiquitously active spies of last night's events at the Jacobins, received him with a coldness such as none would yesterday have dared to show to so great a man.

He told his tale in terms of passionate rhetoric; the burning patriot, the saint who was ready at need to become a martyr in the holy cause of Liberty. He did not move them. They were not the mob. They were cold, calculating men of affairs. Not even the fact that they were of his own party, men of the Mountain all of them, disposed them in his favour.

It was in vain that he paraded the astuteness by means of which he had fooled the conspirators into believing him one of themselves, in vain that he expounded and exalted his devotion

to the cause of liberty, in vain that in a supreme gesture of contempt he flung the hundred thousand francs upon the table before them. And it was equally in vain that he demanded of them a safe-conduct, so as to enable him to continue his investigations. It may have occurred to them that he might use it to place himself beyond the frontier.

At last, before their impassivity, he realized that he was lost. Desperately he played his last card.

"These traitors are to meet at my house to-morrow evening at eight o'clock." And now at last he named names, thinking perhaps to impress them with those of three members of the Convention, of the party of the Mountain, one of whom, indeed, was of the first importance Bazire, Delaunay, Julien and the banker Benoît.

Thus the little craven betrayed his associates in the hope of saving his own neck by turning witness against them.

"Send to my house to-morrow at eight, and you shall take the lot. I'll have them there for you."

"You establish your patriotism," said Barère. But he was smiling curiously. He added "But are you sure that you have named them all?"

Chabot sucked in his plump cheeks under the shock of that question. It suggested that he told the Committee nothing that it did not already know. Indeed, not quite all that it did know. It seemed he was only just in time.

"Faith, I was forgetting one, who is of less importance. A fellow named Moreau."

"Ah yes," said Barère still with that curious smile on his high-bred face. "I thought you had overlooked Moreau. Well, well, it is understood. At eight o'clock to-morrow." The others nodded.

Chabot lingered, perplexed. There had been no word of thanks, yet they seemed to dismiss him. It could not be.

"Why do you wait, Chabot?" It was Billaud-Varennes who put the question.

"Is that all?" he asked, bewildered.

"Unless you have more to say That is all. Until eight o'clock to-morrow."

He went out awkwardly, like a dismissed lackey rather than a master turning his back upon his servants; for until this morning that had more nearly approached their respective positions.

He walked home haunted by that enigmatic smile on the lips of Barère. What had the insolent fellow meant by it? Was

he presuming upon what had happened last night at the Jacobins to be putting on airs and graces with a patriot of Chabot's consequence. The damned aristocrat ! For Bertrand Barère de Vieuzac of Tarbes was a gentleman by birth. He belonged to a class that Chabot from his earliest days had hated with the instinctive hatred of the base for his betters. It was a fact concerning him that Chabot had overlooked. He would be giving a little attention presently to this Monsieur Barère de Vieuzac. He would have the damned head off that vile aristocrat before many weeks were over.

And how the devil did he come to know that André-Louis Moreau was in the affair ?

If Chabot had possessed the answer to that question, he would have been a little less confident about his future ability to deal with Barère. He was not to know that upon the table of the Committee of Public Safety had lain since yesterday a full report of the India Company swindle from the pen of the Committee's very diligent secret agent André-Louis Moreau, and that the Committee had already decided upon its course of action which was nowise influenced by the visit of Chabot.

It was not quite the course of action now agreed with him. The arrests took place next day and they took place at eight o'clock. But it was at eight o'clock in the morning, without waiting for Chabot to bring the conspirators together. They were arrested separately. Chabot, half-stupefied, wildly protesting error in terms of coarsest blasphemy, then as wildly protesting that the person of a deputy was inviolable, was dragged from the side of his little Poldine, who stopped her ears, shuddering at his obscenities. With each of the others named—excepting only André-Louis Moreau—it fared the same. And at the same hour yet another was arrested. Fabre d'Eglantine whom Chabot had not named, but whom André-Louis had not omitted from his report.

CHAPTER XXXIV

THORIN'S LETTER

By noon that day the town was in a ferment. Crowds were assembling in the Gardens of the Tuileries. Crowds paraded

through the streets howling death to all and sundry. Crowds besieged the hall of the Jacobins. Crowds clamoured about the precincts of the Convention. From the galleries the women of the markets hurled shrill insults at the absent fallen legislators, demanding to know whom they could trust.

That demand was on the lips of every patriot that morning. If Chabot was false to his duty, whom could they believe true to it? If Chabot abused his position to swindle the people, whom could they believe honest?

There were those who mingled with the crowds to fan their anger, and direct its course; men of rough patriotic appearance from the red bonnets on their heads to the clogs on their feet, who fiercely proclaimed that France had exchanged one set of tyrants for another which battered still more greedily upon her misery. An unfortunate dandy crossing the terrace of the Feuillants was seized and butchered as an expression of popular rage, for no better reason than because his head was powdered and some virgo had raised the cry that he dusted his head with flour whilst the people had no bread.

Things began to look so wicked that the National Guards were brought out to restore some order and afford protection to the threatened Conventionals until the people's anger should have cooled.

De Batz kept his room in the Rue-de-Ménars, so that any of those industrious agents of his at their inflammatory work should know where to find him if he were needed. He chafed there in impatience, pacing to and fro in the little salon, and pausing ever and anon to listen to the uproar of that November morning. He was fretted too by the absence of André-Louis, who had gone out early, leaving no word of what business took him abroad.

It was a little past noon when he returned. His pallor; the compression of his lips, and a feverish glitter in his eyes gave evidence of suppressed excitement.

"Where have you been?" de Batz greeted him.

André-Louis took off the great-coat in which he was wrapped. "To receive the thanks of the Committee of Public Safety." And to the frowning Baron he gave at last the news of what he had done, of the report which he had drawn up for the Committee's information.

"You did this?" There was a rumble of resentment in the Gascon's voice.

"Faith, it was becoming necessary to establish my position. An agent must do something to justify himself. After the outbreak in the Convention yesterday I foresaw what must

happen. I have the measure of Chabot. If I anticipated the betrayal of his associates which he would inevitably make, I hurt no one and profited myself. I take long views, Jean."

"But very secret ones." De Batz was annoyed. "Why did you withhold your confidence?"

"You might have opposed me. You can be obstinate. Besides, I haven't withheld it. I am telling you now. There was no need to tell you at all."

"Much obliged for your frankness. Whom did you denounce in your report?"

"All those whom I judged that Chabot would denounce—all save one, Benoît, whom I excluded but whom Chabot betrayed. I might have known he would. Yet Benoît may save himself. As for the others, they make up a fine baker's batch!" He used the synical term "*fournée*" that was already current to describe the daily immolations.

He explained himself a little more. Some of the Baron's annoyance melted. But not all of it. He still complained that André-Louis was too secretive.

"Have I blundered anywhere? You hear what is going on." André-Louis defended himself. "My God, Jean, we've raised a storm that will take some calming."

It was so, indeed. You may read in the *Moniteur* of the agitations of the days that followed; the furious invectives in the Convention against corruption, by which those who remained sought to restore in themselves the shaken confidence of the people; the very terms of the accusation levelled at Chabot and his associates. "Peculation and conspiracy tending to vilify and destroy by corruption the Revolutionary Government."

But the storm was not yet to be allayed. To placate the wrath of the outraged people, many more arrests were decreed, arrests which included the brothers Frey and even the unfortunate Léopoldine. Robespierre himself took fright at the violence of this earthquake which shook the Mountain to its very foundations, and threatened to hurl him from his eminence on its summit. He sent in haste to recall Saint-Just from Strasbourg, so that in this hour of dreadful need he might have beside him that bright revolutionary arch-angel.

Saint-Just arrived, and went earnestly and craftily to work to restore the shaken confidence.

Oratory is impressive according to the lips from which it falls. Saint-Just's lips were believed to be pure. There was faith in him because of his reputation for asceticism and Spartan frugality. He had been an example of all the civic virtues.

The purity of morals which he passionately demanded was no more than that which he practised himself.

So that when Saint-Just came to condemn in unmeasured terms the corruption of those fellow Conventionals who had been imprisoned, it seemed to the people that at last they heard their own voice presenting an indictment to the Convention.

And so craftily did Saint-Just go to work that he not merely stilled resentment against the Mountain he actually made capital for it out of the event.

He made of the shameless speculation which had brought about the downfall of Chabot and his associates a pretext for all those evils under which the people groaned and had been growing restive. They went hungry, he assured them, because a pack of rogues had embezzled the public substance. He thanked Heaven that discovery had come before the harm was beyond repair.

So soon as the devoted legislators who remained had straightened out the tangle left by that corruption, there would be an end to all distress.

Conquered by his arguments, above all believing in that closing promise, confidence was at last restored, and with it peace and the will to endure the inevitable hardships which the transition from tyranny to liberty was imposing.

Saint-Just's victory on behalf of his party was assisted by a fortunate turn in the tide of war. He was able to point to the good work he had done in Strasbourg. Toulon, it was true, remained a focus of reactionary activity, held by royalists and foreigners thanks to the wiles of the perfidious Pitt. But elsewhere the arms of the Republic were victorious, and on the frontiers the enemies of liberty were being firmly held.

Further to divert the public attention came a side-show, a struggle of Titans. Danton and Hébert were locked in death-grips, and it says much for the indomitable courage of Danton that he should have chosen this moment for a trial of strength with one who exercised such control over the Commune, the police, the Revolutionary Army and even the Revolutionary Tribunal, as the scoundrelly editor of the *Père Duchesne*, the man who more than any other was the advocate of bloodshed, the enemy of all authority, the anarch who, having laboured to dethrone a king, had since laboured to dethrone God Himself.

Danton's constructive mind accounted that the ground had been sufficiently cleared by the immolation of the Girondins. In his view it was time to restore order and authority. He had come back from Arcis to preach moderation, and he had met the ruthless opposition of Hébert. Battle was joined between them.

Robespierre held aloof watching well-content Whether intoxicated with the growth of his power he perceived the way to a dictatorship, or whether he would be content with a triumvirate in which he would rule with his two acolytes Saint-Just and Couthon, it was to his interests that the rival forces represented by Hébert and Danton should first engage each other. He would deal with the survivor when the time came.

Equally watchful was de Batz. It was not without disappointment that he had seen that very promising storm allayed by the eloquence of Saint-Just. At the same time he lent an ear to André-Louis' confident assurances that what had been done once could be done again.

"Next time," said André-Louis, "there will be no recovery. Public confidence, badly shaken by this blow, will collapse completely under a second one. Be sure of that."

"I can be sure of that, but not of another opportunity."

"Opportunity comes to him who watches. And I am watching. Robespierre is the only incorruptible. This struggle between Danton and Hébert may bring much to light at any moment. I am working with Desmoulins in the Dantonist interest, and so I am at the very centre of present political activities."

Inspired by some of his confidence de Batz possessed himself in patience, and laboured unremittingly. His make-believe patriots were mingling with the crowds again, inflaming public opinion in Danton's favour upon every opportunity. His pamphleteers were at work, and André-Louis as a contributor to the *Vieux Cordelier* was seconding with his pen the labours of Desmoulins. He liked Desmoulins, detecting in him a kindred spirit; and he could work with him the more agreeable since this young man at least was not one of the faggots that was being dried for the fire.

Nor was this all. Unremittingly André-Louis studied the ground to discover a fresh vulnerable point in the position of the Mountain. It arose out of Desmoulins' alliance with Danton that he too kept an eye on the future, and worked for the time when Danton, having disposed of Hébert, should come to measure himself against the Robespierrists. In the course of this he made certain attacks upon Saint-Just. They were playful as yet, aiming at no more than to raise a laugh or two at Saint-Just's expense. But one of them had stung the young representative into a wickedly menacing retort.

"He regards his head," Desmoulins had written, "as the

cornerstone of the Republic, and he carries it on his shoulders with the reverence due to the Saint Sacrament."

A few days after this, early one morning in November, Desmoulins broke in upon the labours of André-Louis. He was excited. His fine eyes were a little wild, and the brown hair was tumbled about a face that might have been noble but for the pockmarks and the pouting lips. The aggravation of his habitual stutter was a further index of the young man's perturbation.

"This fellow Saint-Just takes himself a thought too seriously. Regards himself as a cross between Brutus and Saint Aloysius of Gonzaga. But there's more of Cassius in him than of either of those."

"You imagine that you bring me news," said André-Louis, surprised only by the outburst. He rose from his table as he spoke, and went to throw some fir-cones on the dwindling fire, for there was a fog abroad and the morning was chill and damp.

"Ah, but do you know what he is saying? That whilst I have written of him that he carries his head like a Saint Sacrament, he will see to it that I shall carry mine like a Saint Denis. What do you think of that?"

As Saint Denis carries his head in the crook of his arm there was only one thing to think of it.

"It's a pretty retort."

"Pretty! It drips blood. A nice threat to be putting about. He'll have me guillotined, will he? He'll make me lose my head for a jest. I think he must have lost his own already since he dares to threaten a man openly in such terms."

"It's imprudent," André-Louis agreed soberly.

"More imprudent than he reckons, or than you suspect, my friend. I am not the man to scuttle before menaces. If this is a declaration of war, I am ready for it." He lugged a paper from his breast. "Here's a windfall. Read this. It should strip the mask from this hypocrite. He won't look so much like Saint Aloysius then."

It proved to be a letter from a man named Thorin who wrote from Blérancourt in bitter denunciation of Saint-Just, whom he styled obviously of malice aforethought, the *ci-devant* Chevalier de Saint-Just. It charged Saint-Just with having bebauched Thorin's young wife and carried her off to Paris, where he kept her secretly as his mistress; and this at a time when, as all the world knew, Saint-Just had just become affianced in marriage to the sister of the Deputy Lebas.

He is true, wrote the indignant husband, to the dissolute aristocratic stock from which he springs. This ci-devant Chevalier de Saint-Just, who postures in Paris as a reformer, has yet to reform himself. The ci-devant Chevalier de Saint-Just is a thief and a scoundrel, as I am in a position to prove. They tell me that in the Convention he is an advocate of purity in private as in public life. Let his own advocacy be applied to him. Let him be purified. The guillotine is the great national purifier.

The writer went on to say that he addressed himself to Desmoulins because from certain phrases in the *Vieux Cordelier* he conceived that Desmoulins at least had begun to suspect the real nature of this debauched hypocrite. He desired not only to avenge the outrage he had suffered, but also to protect the unfortunate woman whom Saint-Just was no doubt upon the point of casting out to die upon the streets.

André-Louis took a deep breath. This came so opportunely to his needs that he could hardly believe in so much good fortune. If these accusations could be established Saint-Just would lie at their mercy. Here, indeed, was the vulnerable point André-Louis had been seeking.

In ordinary circumstances, and despite the cant of purity to which the Conventionals, especially since the fall of Chabot, were becoming so addicted, the matter of carrying off another man's wife would have been none too seriously viewed. But the circumstances dressed up the event into a monstrosity. The fact that Saint-Just had just betrothed himself to the sister of Lebas, discounted the possibility of any condoning genuine affection towards Madame Thorin, made her just the victim of his reckless lust.

The capital to be made of it was enormous. It would have been enormous, following upon the India Company swindle, whatever member of the Mountain had been concerned. But that it should be Saint-Just, the popular idol, the first of Robespierre's supporters, the very man who had denounced the corruption of Chabot, and by faith in himself restored faith in his party, rendered incalculable the consequences of exposure, transcended the wildest hopes that André-Louis could have entertained.

But there was no need for haste. First let Danton send the Hébertists the way of the Girondins. Then, when the arena was cleared for the final inevitable struggle between Danton and Robespierre, would be the time to strike a blow with this in which its consequences must destroy the Robespierrists and the revolution with them

André-Louis returned the letter.

"Yes," he said slowly "if you act cautiously, you have him. That's a good phrase about the *ci-devant* Chevalier de Saint-Just. You might remember it, and use it presently. There's a world of prejudice packed into it for patriotic minds. It's a good phrase, too, about his being true to the dissolute aristocratic stock from which he springs. I shall remember it. This Thorin seems an alert fellow. You must send for him. Bring him up to Paris. Have him under your hand when the time comes. He may be able to reveal other things. He says there that Saint-Just is a thief as well as a scoundrel. He may allude to other thefts besides that of his wife. Lose no time Camille. But remember to be cautious."

Desmoulins remembered everything but that. It was something he had never learned. He talked freely, forgetting that Saint-Just was still a popular idol; more than ever a popular idol since the late disillusion occasioned by the disclosures of the Chabot scandal. His dark hints were reported to Saint-Just, and evidently understood by him, for some ten days later Desmoulins came again in quest of André-Louis, and this time he was in a condition of dismay.

"The scoundrel has checkmated us. Thorin has come to Paris. But he has come under arrest. He's lodged in the Conciergerie."

André-Louis was grave for a moment. Then he laughed. "That's not checkmate, unless it's checkmate to himself. He has magnificently deepened the extent of his turpitude."

But Desmoulins, white-faced, shook his head. "You suppose him a fool. You're wrong. Thorin has been arrested for participation in a royalist conspiracy. If it were not for that, Danton could smash Saint-Just to pulp this moment from the tribune of the Convention. Two questions would accomplish it. But to those questions that astute devil has his answers. Thorin is a royalist conspirator. The tale of his wife, an unsupported lie. She does not live with Saint-Just. He is too clever for that. He keeps her in concealment. I have been investigating, and without Thorin's evidence there is nothing to connect her with him."

"Damn your investigations," said André-Louis. "That is what has put Saint-Just on the alert. And then this fool Thorin . . . To conspire . . ." He checked suddenly. "What do you know of the conspiracy?"

"Oh, that! A trumped-up business, I should say. Easy enough in these days."

"Yes. Easy enough. Easier for a man in Saint-Just's position to issue a letter of cachet than ever it was for any King Louis. This is what these villains make of liberty."

"Say that again," cried Desmoulins, and seized a pencil and a scrap of paper from the writing-table

"I'll say it again; but you must not use it until the time comes"

"When will that be?"

"After I have been to Blérancourt."

"What?" Desmoulins straightened himself to look at him in wonder.

"That is where the truth will lie. I'll go and see if I can extract it. But while I am absent, not a word, not a single word of the business, and above all, not a line about Saint-Just in the *Vieux Cordelier*. An incautious premature word, and Saint-Just will have the heads of the lot of us. He can do it, remember. The arrest of Thorin shows you that he can do anything."

Desmoulins intimidated—for he was really brave only with the pen—swore to obey, then asked him how he proposed to proceed.

"That's to be considered," said André-Louis.

He considered it later with de Batz, who beheld at last in the plan which André-Louis expounded the fruition of all their labours. And André-Louis had come back to his first impression.

"In arresting Thorin the blackguard over-reached himself. That is, if at Blérancourt I can accomplish what I hope to accomplish."

"If you do," said de Batz, "our battle will be won. Robespierre and his Mountain will never survive the fresh storm we'll raise, following so soon upon the last. You will definitely have opened the way for the return of the King."

CHAPTER XXXV

MESSENGERS

ANDRÉ-LOUIS had grown leaner than his habit in those days, and this not from any Lenten fare. For however hunger might

tighten its grip upon the people, there was no fasting for those who could pay—and the Baron was certainly of these.

It was the mental strain of that time of intrigue and anxious labour that had worn him; and mingled with this a yearning that seemed to gnaw his vitals, intensified by the utter absence of direct news from Aline de Kercadiou. He assured himself that it was at the dictates of prudence that she had not sent him any letter by any of the occasional messengers who passed between Monsieur d'Entragues and his Paris agent, the Chevalier de Pomelles, and he sought to content himself with the personal assurances which one or two of these had been able to give him that Mademoiselle de Kercadiou continued at Hamm with her father and that she was well.

There had been a curious passage with Langéac, met by merest chance at Pomelles' house at Bourg-Egalité. One of André-Louis' periodic visits to the royalist agent in quest of news had happened to synchronize with the arrival there of Langéac coming straight from Hamm. It was the young royalist's first visit to Paris since his flight after the miscarried affair at the Temple.

At sight of André-Louis he had visibly lost colour and his eyes had dilated, so that André-Louis had exclaimed: "How now, Langéac. Am I a ghost?"

"Faith! It is what I ask myself."

It was André-Louis' turn to stare: "Do you mean that you have supposed me dead for all these months?"

"What else was I to suppose?"

"What else? What else? Name of a name! But Verney followed you to Hamm with the news of my survival. Did you never hear of it?"

Langéac's expression was odd. He looked uncomfortable. His eyes shifted under the other's keen regard, and it was only after a long moment that he answered: "Ah, Verney! Verney was delayed on the road——"

"But he got there ultimately," André-Louis interrupted him impatiently. The sluggishness of Langéac's wits had always moved him to impatience. He had never concealed from Langéac that he accounted him a fool, and Langéac had resented this with all a fool's mean bitterness.

"Oh yes," he answered slowly, sneering. "He got there ultimately. But I had left by then."

"Yet you have been there since. You are just arrived from there. Did you never hear that I survived?"

"I never heard you mentioned that I can remember," drawled

Langéac. And further to put him down he added: "Why should they mention you?"

Exasperated André-Louis looked at the Chevalier de Pomelles, who sat gravely listening. "He asks me that? I suppose they know at Hamm what keeps me here in Paris. I suppose they are aware that I risk the guillotine every day of the week in my endeavours to wreck the revolution, and bring the House of Bourbon back to France. I suppose they know it, Monsieur de Pomelles?"

"Oh, but of course they know it." The Chevalier was emphatic. "They know it and esteem it."

That had happened two months ago, in September. Thereafter Monsieur de Langéac had lingered in Paris until the fall of Chabot and the popular ferment that had followed it. De Batz had thought it right that some account of this should be sent to the Regent, and with André-Louis had sought Pomelles for the purpose. Pomelles had agreed with him, and having Langéac under his hand, proposed to use him as the bearer of the news. There was at that moment in the minds of the members of the Royalist Committee in Paris some little doubt as to the Regent's precise whereabouts. Whilst there was no positive news that he had yet left Hamm, it was known that his duty lay in Toulon, where the royalists, supported by Admiral Hood with the British fleet and by some Spanish troops were making their resolute stand. The presence amongst them of the representative of the House of Bourbon, on whose behalf this stand was being made, was being so urgently demanded that it was probable he would already have set out to place himself at their head. But in the absence of positive information, Langéac's instructions were that he should go to Hamm in the first instance, following the Regent thence if he should already have departed, and making his way to Toulon by sea from Leghorn or some other convenient Italian port, since by land the place was unapproachable.

As he was setting out André-Louis came to ask of him the favour of bearing a letter to Mademoiselle de Kercadiou. It was a letter whose chief object was to beg her to send him, be it but a line in her own hand, herself to confirm the assurances he received indirectly that all was well with her and with his godfather.

Monsieur de Langéac accepted perforce the commission, and there could be little doubt that he had executed it, since it was known that in spite of those insistent demands for the Regent's presence in Toulon, his highness was still at Hamm when Langéac arrived there, and indeed for some time thereafter.

His lingering there was a circumstance exasperating to a good

many of Monsieur's supporters, and to none more exasperating than to the Comte d'Avaray whose affection for him was sincere, who had his honour at heart, and who was distressed to know that his neglect of it in this hour of crisis was by many being assigned to pusillanimity.

It may well be that pusillanimity and sloth played some part in that reluctance to depart from the dull security of Hamm. Monsieur d'Entragues, however, did not think so, and Monsieur d'Entragues was not happy. To him, whatever reasons there may have been to account for the Regent's inaction, it was clear that one of them was his infatuation for Mademoiselle de Kercadiou. Out of his cynical knowledge of men Monsieur d'Entragues was persuaded that the real cure for this lay in possession. Therefore he had practised patience. But time was passing. The Regent's interests demanded his presence in Toulon. Yet if he advised this, he might miss his chance of encompassing the supplanting of Madame de Balbi, and so, of assuming a definite and abiding ascendancy over d'Avaray. Thus d'Entragues was confronted with a choice of evils, and in his heart he cursed the prudishness of Mademoiselle de Kercadiou which had made her withstand in all these months the assiduous wooing of his highness.

What, in Heaven's name, did the girl want? Had she no sense of duty to a prince of the blood? It was not even as if she were restrained by any mawkish sense of duty in any other quarter, since she believed that her unspeakable plebeian lover Moreau had perished four months ago. And what the devil ailed his highness that he should be so patient and so nice? Since Monsieur knew his own mind, why didn't he take a short way with the girl? He loved to be accounted a libertine. Why the devil couldn't he behave like one?

D'Entragues had thoughts of giving him a hint to that effect. But he hesitated. And meanwhile d'Avaray was at the Regent's elbow, pressing him with talk of honour and duty to go and encourage by his presence those who were ready to lay down their lives for him in Toulon.

Things were in this pass when Langéac arrived at Hamm with the news of the events in Paris which were shaking the credit of the Convention in the eyes of the people. He reported himself to d'Entragues, and d'Entragues carried him off to the Regent, and was the only witness to the interview in that long bare room of the ch^âlet, where his highness kept a diminished court, now that his brother d'Artois had departed for Russia to solicit the support of the Empress.

The morning had been an unhappy one for his highness. D'Avaray had been more than usually insistent upon the Prince's duty in Toulon. The news brought by Langéac dissipated some of his gloom.

"It is something at last," he approved. "More I confess than ever I had expected from that Gascon braggart."

In correcting the ungracious Prince's impression, it may be that Langéac spoke to his instructions without reflecting, or it may be that like a mean sycophant he was in haste to curry favour by discrediting the Baron.

"It is, monseigneur, less the work of Monsieur de Batz than of Moreau."

"Moreau?" The bulging eyes of his highness grew round in their stare. Then, recollection returning to him, he frowned. "Ah! Moreau? He is still alive, then?" He conveyed the impression that he was not pleased. A difficult man, thought Langéac.

"He has an uncanny gift of life, monseigneur."

His highness appeared to have lost interest in the news. Shortly he thanked Monsieur de Langéac for his diligence, and dismissed him.

Monsieur d'Entragues conducted him. A lodging was prepared for him in the châlet. But this was not the cause of the Count's civility.

"Touching this man Moreau," he said, when they were outside the Regent's room; "it were best that you did not mention to anybody the fact that he is still alive. Reasons of State. You understand?"

"Not to anybody?" Langéac questioned. His foolish face was vacuous.

"That is what I said, sir. You will mention it to nobody."

"But that is impossible. I have a letter from him. A letter for Mademoiselle de Kercadiou. If she is still here in Hamm——"

He was interrupted. "The letter changes nothing. You will give it to me. I ask for it in the name of his highness. And you will forget that you bore it." Under Langéac's puzzled regard, he repeated: "Reasons of State. Grave reasons of State, which I am not at liberty to explain to you."

There was a pause. Then Langéac shrugged, surrendered the letter and gave the required promise. It is possible that his unfriendliness towards André-Louis may have helped to render him indifferent.

The Comte d'Entragues returned to his highness. "This man Moreau has written again," he dryly announced.

"Written?" The Regent looked up at him. His eyes were dull.

"To Mademoiselle de Kercadiou. I have the letter here. We can hardly suffer it to be delivered now. It will betray the fact that there have been other letters."

His highness was quick to grasp the implication. "Damn your meddling, d'Entragues. Is this all that's to come of it? If this fellow Moreau survives in the end your suppression of his letters will come to be discovered. How shall we look then?"

"My shoulders will bear that burden, monseigneur. No need to betray your highness' part in a measure charitably intended. And, anyway, it is unlikely that he will survive. His luck cannot hold for ever."

"Ha! But if it does?"

The Count's lean, swarthy face, so deeply scored with lines despite his comparative youth, was inscrutable. The glance of his dark eyes was steady. "Does your highness ask me?"

"You heard me."

"In your place, monseigneur," he said quietly and slowly, "I should so have contrived by now that news of Moreau's survival, if it reached Mademoiselle de Kercadiou at all, should reach her too late to be welcome, too late to matter."

"My God! What are you suggesting?"

"That your highness has been too patient."

The Regent appeared to be scandalized.

D'Entragues elaborated. "To be patient in these matters is no mark of gallantry. Women are not flattered by it. They'll sooner forgive an excess of ardour. Lukewarm desire is a reflection on their charms."

"Morbleu d'Entragues! You're a villain."

"In the service of your highness I am whatever will serve you best. And where's the villainy? I have never known you hesitate to employ those powers which past experience must have shown your highness that you possess over all women. Why should you hesitate to employ them now? Toulon awaits you impatiently. Yet you cannot decide to go. I perfectly understand this reluctance. What I do not understand is that you should be jeopardizing everything to this—your highness will forgive the word—to this infatuation."

"A thousand devils, d'Entragues!" His highness was peevish. "Now you talk like d'Avaray, who has presumed to preach me a sermon on my duty which lasted for over an hour."

"I talk not at all like d'Avaray. D'Avaray does not understand your difficulties. He offers you a choice of evils. You

are to be false to your duty or false to your feelings. I show you how both may be served. Set out for Toulon. But take Mademoiselle de Kercadiou with you."

"Ah! The advice is easily given. But would she come? Would she come?"

D'Entraques' steady glance continued levelled upon the big florid countenance of his master. The faintest of smiles, in which there was a tinge of cruelty, hovered about his thin lips. Slowly, significantly, at last, he said: "In certain circumstances there is no doubt that she would go."

The bulging eyes shifted to avoid the minister's glance.

"And Kercadiou?" he asked. "What of him? Would he . . ." He could not find words in which to conclude the sentence.

D'Entraques shrugged. "Monsieur de Kercadiou has no higher sense than the sense of his duty to the blood royal. It would surprise me if he had not the same sense of the duty of his womenfolk. But if you doubt it, monseigneur, if the presence of Monsieur de Kercadiou restrains you . . ."

Into the Count's thoughtful pause flashed the Prince's swift assertion: "It does. Damnably. What else do you suppose has restrained me? What else is responsible for this patience of mine which you presume to deplore?"

"It would be easy to remove him," said the intriguer quietly.

He disclosed the means. Let the Regent announce his departure for Toulon, which, after all, could no longer be delayed. He would go by way of Turin and Leghorn. There was an urgent message to be sent to the Prince de Condé in Belgium, and meanwhile, Monsieur de Langéac, their usual messenger, would already have been despatched elsewhere. The only other person whom the Regent could spare from attendance to bear those letters to Condé was Monsieur de Kercadiou. His niece could hardly accompany him on such a mission. She would remain in Hamm. The presence there of Kercadiou's cousin, Madame de Plougastel, would make this easy.

The Regent sat considering, his chin upon his breast. His face had lost some of its high colour. Temptation, so fiendishly presented, had him by the throat.

"And afterwards?" he asked.

The Comte d'Entraques permitted himself a cynical little laugh.

"Preventive measures may have been employed against your highness in the past. I do not know. But has your highness ever been troubled afterwards?"

And so it came to pass that in the afternoon, Langéac, barely rested from his journey, was riding out of Hamm again, this time charged with the arrangement of relays along the road by which his highness was to travel in the course of the next few days. It was only after his departure that the urgent need of a courier for the Prince de Condé was discovered, and Monsieur de Kercadiou invited, in default of any other, to undertake the task. It was not for the Lord of Gavrillic to shirk a duty, whatever it might be, in the service of his Prince. His instructions were that upon the performance of his errand he was to return to Hamm, and there await the further orders of the Regent.

If Aline was anxious on her uncle's behalf, she displayed no sign of it. Anxieties on her own she had none. She would await his return in Hamm. Meanwhile, the only care she manifested was concerned with the details of his equipment for the journey.

Not only in the châtelet, but among the few émigrés elsewhere in the village there was now relief and satisfaction. At last Monsieur was to bestir himself to action and hasten to Toulon.

The only person whom the events at all disgruntled was the Comte de Plougastel. Younger than the Lord of Gavrillic by ten years, of great physical vigour and endurance, accustomed moreover to come and go as an ambassador of the Princes, he took it as a personal reflection upon his ability in these matters that Monsieur de Kercadiou should have been preferred to him for that mission to the camp of the Prince de Condé. He complained of it to d'Entragues.

"To be frank, I find it very odd. I am curious to know in what I have deserved Monsieur's displeasure."

"His displeasure. My dear Plougastel! It is the very contrary. His highness esteems you so highly that he desires you near his person in this crisis."

Plougastel's face lightened. "I am, then, to accompany him to Toulon?"

"That is hardly possible, however desirable to his highness. You will understand that Monsieur's attendance on that journey must be reduced to the bare minimum."

"But then?" Plougastel was frowning again. "Monsieur d'Entragues, it seems to me that you contradict yourself. Monsieur does not send me on a mission of a kind in which I am experienced. He sends in my place a man who is barely equal to the fatigue of the journey. Especially in this December weather. He does this because he desires me near his person. Yet in two days' time, when he departs for Toulon, I am to be left behind."

D'Entragues was smooth with him. "Things often appear

contradictory without being so at heart. His highness has his own ends to serve. I can tell you no more. If you are not satisfied, you must ask Monsieur himself."

Plougastel departed more aggrieved than he had come, and went to plague his countess with his ill-humoured conjectures.

CHAPTER XXXVI

THE INTERRUPTION

ALINE sat in the room above stairs which for nearly a year now she and her uncle had occupied at the Bear Inn. Never in her life had she felt more alone than on this evening of that day on which Monsieur de Kercadiou had set out on his long ride to Condé in Belgium. The loneliness of it seemed to renew the sense of bereavement which had been with her in those black weeks just after she had received the news of the death of André-Louis. She was weary at heart and despondent. Life seemed a dreary emptiness.

She had supped alone, very sparingly and mechanically. The table had been cleared, and the candles snuffed. In a kindly sympathetic apprehension of her loneliness, the landlord had come in person to perform this little service and solicitously to inquire if there was anything still lacking for her comfort.

She sat sadly dreaming, a book of Horace in her lap, a translation of the Odes. It was not a volume she would have chosen for her own entertainment. Yet it had been her constant companion in these last five months. It had been a favourite with André-Louis; and she read what he had so often read, merely so that she might turn her mind into channels in which his own had flowed. Thus she sought the fond delusion of a spiritual communion.

But to-night the words she had read remained meaningless. Loneliness weighed too heavily upon her. To dispel it, at last, towards ten o'clock, came the Regent.

He entered quietly and unheralded. He had been a frequent visitor in this unconventional manner, coming upon her at all hours of the day in the last three months.

Softly he closed the door, and from the threshold stood observing her. He had removed his round hat ; but he was still heavily cloaked, and his shoulders were lightly powdered with snow.

From the street below at that moment rose the hoarse voice of the night watchmen calling the hour of ten. Rising slowly to receive him, that call prompted the form of her greeting.

"It is late for your highness to be abroad."

A smile softened the stare of the prominent eyes. "Late or early, my dear Aline, I exist to serve you." He loosened his cloak, slipped it from his shoulders, and moved forward to fling it across a chair. Then the heavy, paunchy figure marched upon her with its lilting strut. He came to a halt very close to her upon the hearth, and mechanically spread one of his podgy white hands to the blaze ; for the solicitudinous landlord had lately made up the fire.

He considered her in silence. He seemed tongue-tied, and an odd nervousness, an indefinable apprehension began to creep upon her.

"It is late," she said again. "I was about to retire. I am none so well to-night, and very weary."

"Ay, you are pale. My poor child ! You will be lonely, too. It was this decided me to seek you, despite the hour. I feel myself to blame." He sighed. "But, child, necessity knows no laws. I had to send to Condé and there was none left at hand but your uncle whom I could employ."

"My uncle, monseigneur, was very willing. We are dutiful. Your highness has no ground for self-reproach."

"Not unless you have reproaches for me."

"I, monseigneur ? If I have a reproach for you it is for having given yourself concern on my behalf. You should not have troubled to seek me so late. And it is snowing. You should not have come."

"Not come ? Knowing you lonely here ?" Very gently, yet with an odd ardour he complained. "How far you still are from understanding me, Aline." He took her hands. "You are cold. And how pale !" He lowered his eyes from her face to continue his survey of her. She wore a taffeta gown of apple green cut low in the bodice as the mode had prescribed when it was made. "I vow your cheeks put your breast to shame for whiteness."

For this, it seemed, he could have found no better medicine than his words. A flush overspread her pallid face, and gently she sought to disengage her hands. But he maintained his grip.

"Why, child, will you be afraid of me ? This is unkind.

And I have been so patient. So patient that I scarcely know myself."

"Patient?" There was a kindling in her eyes, a frown between them. All timidity left her, to be replaced by dignity.

"Monseigneur, it grows late. I am here alone. I am sensible of your interest. But you do me too much honour."

"Not half the honour I desire to do you. Aline, why will you be cruel? Why will you be indifferent to my suffering? Does this soft white bosom hold a heart of stone? Or is it that you do not trust me? They have told you that I am fickle. They malign me, Aline. Or else, if I have been fickle, it is yours to cure me of that. I could be constant to you, child. Constant as the stars."

He loosed one of her hands, to set his ponderous arm about her shoulders. He sought to draw her to him, but found in her an unsuspected strength which the soft, flabby fellow could not subdue.

"Monseigneur, this is not worthy." She wrenched herself free, and stood straight and tense before him, her head high. He watched the play of the candlelight in her hair of gold, the ebb and flow of colour in her delicate cheeks, the curve of her lovely throat, and became exasperated by her unreasonableness. Was he not a prince of the blood? Who, after all, was she? The daughter of a rustic Bréton nobleman, the child of a house of no account; yet she fronted him with the airs of a duchess. Worse. For there was no duchess in France, he was convinced, would have offered such cold reserves to his wooing. Of all the princes of the blood he stood nearest to the throne and was likely to be king one day. Did she overlook this in her silly prudishness? Was she insensible to the honour which he did her, to the honours which might be hers?

But he gave utterance to none of these unanswerable arguments. There was a cold rustic virtue here that was not to be melted by them. In his anger his passion was in danger of transmutation. Indeed, it stood delicately poised upon the borderline. He was moved almost to a desire to hurt her. Obeying it, he might have taken a short way with the little fool; but he loathed all violent action. He was too overburdened with flesh and too scant of breath; and from the manner in which she had disengaged herself from his grasp he actually doubted if his strength would prove a match for hers.

He must have recourse to subtlety. He had always more faith in his wits than in his sinews.

"Not worthy?" he echoed. He looked at her sadly, his big

liquid eyes full of a pathetic pleading. "So be it, child. You shall school me in worth. For if there is one thing in this world of which I would be worthy, you are that thing. I set worthiness of that above worthiness of the throne itself." Thus he reminded her how near the throne he stood. But it seemed to have no weight with the little fool.

She continued wrapped in a dignity which made her seem of ice.

"Monseigneur, I am alone here," she was beginning and there she checked to look at him more keenly, the throb of a sudden thought perceptible in her quickening glance.

She reviewed in a flash the past months in which he had imposed his companionship upon her; remembered the esteem in which she had held it, the flattery which she had accounted it. She recalled occasional attempts of his to overstep the boundaries of a platonic friendship, but how quickly on each occasion he had retreated the moment she had shown it to be unwelcome. Reviewing all those lapses now in the aggregate, she blamed herself for having lacked the wit to perceive whither he was ultimately aiming. In her blindness and in her very listlessness, it seemed to her now that she had encouraged him by continuing a companionship in which such lapses had been repeated. Not a doubt but he had classed her with those who, like the woman in the song, vowing that she would ne'er consent, consented. Perhaps he had thought her restrained by the lack of proper opportunity. And now he had created it.

"Was it for this," she asked him, "that you sent my uncle on a mission to the Prince de Condé? To leave me here defenceless?"

"Defenceless? What a word, Aline! What defence do you need other than that of your will? Would any dare do violence to it? Not I, at least."

"You reassure me, monseigneur." Was she ironical, he wondered. And then, with an inclination of her dainty head, she added: "I beg, monseigneur, that you will leave me."

But he remained squarely planted on his stout legs, and with his head a little on one side surveyed her, archly smiling. "I am not used to be dismissed," he reminded her.

She put a hand to her brow in a gesture of weariness. "Your highness will forgive me. But etiquette here . . ."

"You are right, and I am wrong. What need to regard etiquette between us, my dear?"

"I understood that you insisted upon the rights of your rank."

"With you? As if I should! Have I ever done so? Have I ever been the Prince to you?"

"You have always been the Prince to me, monseigneur."

"Then it has not been by my insistence. To you I have never desired to be more than just a man; the man for whom you might come to care, Aline; the man whose devotion might melt you into perceiving some worth in him. Does it offend you, child, to hear me say I love you? Does it offend you that I offer you my worship, as I offer you my destiny, my very life?"

He was the suppliant now. The fat voice was softly modulated. There was something akin to a tear in it. And he went on without giving her time to answer him.

"You have aroused in me feelings that seem to have changed my nature. I have no thought but of you, no care but to be near you, no fear but the fear of losing you. Is all this nothing to you? Nothing it may be. But offend you it cannot. If you are indeed a woman, and God knows you are that, Aline, it must move you to compassion for me. I suffer. Can you be insensible? Will you see a man so tortured that he must end by being false to himself, false to his mission, false to his very duty because you have made him mad?"

"This is wild talk, monseigneur!" she cried out, and then abruptly presented him with the question: "What does your highness want of me?"

"What I want?" he faltered. Plague take the girl. Could a man be more explicit? Did she think to checkmate him by asking him to express the inexpressible? "What I want!" He opened wide his arms. "Aline!"

But here was no eagerness to respond to the invitation and fling herself upon that portly, royal bosom. She continued to regard him with a quizzically bitter little smile.

"If you will not say it, monseigneur, why, then, I will. Thus we shall be clear. You are asking me to become your mistress, I think."

If she thought to abash him by thus reducing to its precise terms the relationship he sought, she was profoundly at fault. His great liquid eyes opened a little wider in astonishment.

"What else can I offer you, my dear? I am already married. And if I were not, there would still be my rank. Though I swear to you that it should count for little with me if it were an obstacle in my way to you. I would barter all for you, and count myself the gainer. I swear I should."

"That is easily sworn, monseigneur."

Gloom descended upon him. "You do not believe me. You do not believe even the evidence of your own senses. Why am I

here? Why do I tarry in Hamm at such a time as this? For many weeks now it has daily been dinned into my ears that my place is in Toulon with those who are making a stand there for throne and altar. Three days ago there arrived here a gentleman sent to me by the royalist committee in Paris, who permitted himself to point out to me my duty, to demand in the name of the nobility of France that I should render myself at once to Toulon and place myself at the head of the forces there. The terms of the demand were presumptuous. And yet I was robbed of even the satisfaction of resenting them, because in my heart I knew that they were justified. I know that I have been false to my duty, to myself, to my house, and to the brave defenders of Toulon. And why have I been false? Because my love for you has put trammels upon me which will not permit me to move. I am chained here, chained to the spot that holds you, Aline. My house may be destroyed, my chances of succeeding to the throne may perish, my honour may go hang before I will be false to my love for you. Does that tell you nothing? Does it afford you no proof of my sincerity? Does it give you no glimpse into the depth of it? Can you still, when you consider this, suppose that I am offering you some trivial and transient passion?"

That she was deeply moved, deeply shaken, he perceived at once. The mantle of dignity in which she had so coldly wrapped herself was permitted to slip from her shoulders. She was pale, and her eyes no longer met his ardent glance with their earlier defiant fearlessness. Although her words still sought to fence him off, they lacked their former bold uncompromising tone.

"But that is all over now. You have conquered this unworthy weakness, monseigneur. You start for Toulon on the day after to-morrow."

"Do I? Do I, indeed? Who will guarantee that? Not I, by my soul."

"What do you mean?" She was looking at him in alarm, leaning forward towards him. He was instantly aware of it; instantly aware that what he had alarmed was her sense of what was due, her concern for those men of her own aristocratic class who had raised the royal standard at Toulon and who were depending upon his presence amongst them. He was quick to perceive how her loyalties were aroused, how intolerable to her must be the thought that those gentlemen should look for him in vain.

"What do I mean?" he answered slowly, a crooked smile on his full sensuous lips. "I mean, Aline, that the fate of Toulon,

the fate of the royalist cause itself is in your hands at this moment. Let that prove to you the depth of my sincerity."

She drew nearer by a step. Her breath quickened. "Oh, you are mad!" she cried. "Mad! You are a prince, the representative of France. Will you allow a whim, a caprice, to make you false to your duty, false to those brave souls who count upon you, who are exposing their lives for you and your house?"

She had come so near to him in her intentness that he was scarcely under the necessity of moving so as to place his left arm round her. He drew her close. Passively she suffered it, listening for his reply, so engrossed in it perhaps as scarcely to be conscious of what he did, or, at least, scarcely caring.

"At need I will do no less," he answered her. "What do I care for anything in this world compared with the care I have for you? My conduct shall prove it. I'll throw away the chances of a throne at need, to show you how little a thing is a throne to me when set against your love, Aline."

"Ah, but you must not. You must not! Oh, this is madness."

She struggled within the coil of his arm. But it was a feeble protesting struggle, very different from that masterful wrench with which earlier she had disengaged herself. "Do you mean that you will not go to Toulon?" There was a horror in her voice as she asked the question.

"That is what I mean, at need. It is in your hands, Aline."

"How in my hands? How in my hands? What are you saying? Why will you put this thing—this dreadful thing—upon me?"

"To afford you the proof you need."

"I need no proof. You owe me no proof of anything. There is nothing between us to be proved. Nothing. Let me go, monseigneur! Ah, let me go!"

"Why so I will, if you insist." But he held her firmly to him. His face was within an inch or two of her own, so white and piteous, so distractingly lovely. "But first hear me, and understand me. I will not go to Toulon—I take oath here that I will not go—that I will not leave Hamm—unless I have assurance of your love, unless I have proof of it, my Aline; proof of it, do you understand?"

As he ended his right arm went round her to reinforce his left, he drew her closer still against him, and his lips descended upon hers and held them.

Under that kiss she shivered, and thereafter lay limp in his embrace. Thus for a few heart-beats she suffered him to hold

her, and in that time her thoughts travelled far down the past and far into the future, for thought knows naught of time and is not to be held within its narrow confines. André-Louis, her lover, the man for whom she would have kept herself, and to keep herself for whom none could ever have robbed her of her strength, had been dead these six months. She had mourned him, and she had entered into the resignation without which life on earth would be unbearable to so many. But something had gone from her which had left her without definite orientation. What did she matter now? To whom could she matter ever again? If this gross Prince desired her; if his desire of her pushed him to such mad lengths that unless he had his way he would betray those of her class and blood who depended upon him, then for their sake, for the sake of her loyalties, for the sake of all that she had been reared to reverence let her sacrifice herself.

Thus, in some nebulous way, during that dreadful moment of his embrace, did her thoughts travel. And then she grew conscious of a sound behind and beyond him. For a moment thereafter his arms continued to enfold her, his lips still pressed her own which were so cold and unresponsive, suffering him in such deadly indifference to have his will upon them. Then he, too, became aware of that movement. He broke away from her abruptly, and turned.

The door had opened, and on the threshold two gentlemen stood at gaze. They were the Comte d'Entraques and the Marquis de La Guiche. The Count's mobile countenance wore a faint, cynical smile of complete understanding. The Marquis, spurred and booted and splashed from travelling, looked on with a black scowl on his hawk-face. And it was he who spoke, his voice harsh and rasping, void of all the deference in which royalty is to be addressed.

"We interrupt you, monseigneur. But it is necessary. The matter is urgent, and cannot wait."

The Regent, at a disadvantage, sought to array himself in frosty dignity. But in such an emergency his figure did not assist the operation. He achieved pompousness.

"What is this, messieurs? How dare you break in upon me?"

D'Entraques presented his companion and his explanations in a breath. "This is Monsieur le Marquis de La Guiche, monseigneur. He has just arrived in Hamm. He is from Toulon with urgent messages."

He might have said more, but the furious Regent gave him no time.

"There is no urgency can warrant such an intrusion when I am private. Am I become of no account?"

It was the Marquis de la Guiche who answered him, his voice stinging incisive. "I begin to think so, monseigneur."

"What's that?" The Regent could not believe that he heard correctly. "What did you say?"

La Guiche, dominant, masterful, his face wicked with anger, ignored the question.

"The matter that brings me cannot wait."

The Regent, in increasing unbelief, looked down his nose at him. "You are insolent. You do not know your place. You will wait upon my convenience, sir."

But the other's voice, growing more harshly vibrant, flung back at him: "I wait upon the convenience of the royalist cause, monseigneur. Its fate is in the balance, and delays may wreck it. That is why I insisted with Monsieur d'Entraques that he should bring me to you instantly wherever you might be." And without more, contemptuous, peremptory, he added the question: "Will you hear me here, or will you come with us?"

The Regent gave him a long arrogant stare before which the other's intrepid glance never wavered. Then his highness waved him out with one of his plump white hands.

"Go, sir. I follow."

De La Guiche bowed stiffly and went, d'Entraques accompanying him and closing the door.

The Regent, white and trembling, turned again to Mademoiselle de Kercadiou. There was a black rage in his heart. But he mastered it to speak to her.

"I will return presently, child," he promised her. "Presently."

He took his strutting way to the door, leaving his cloak where it lay.

Dazed with fear and shame, for she had read the thoughts of La Guiche as if they had been printed on his face, she watched Monsieur depart. She stood, with one hand clutching at her heaving bosom, until his footsteps, accompanied by those of his two companions, had faded on the stairs. Then she span round, went down on her knees by a chair, and burying her face in her hands lay there convulsed by sobs.

CHAPTER XXXVII

THE CANDID MARQUIS

MONSIEUR was trembling from head to foot when he stepped out of that room on the first floor of the Bear Inn. He was at once racked by chagrin at the inopportuneness of the interruption and swept by anger at the manner of it.

On the gallery he found the two gentlemen awaiting him. D'Entragues lounged against the rail. La Guiche stood tense. He too, was trembling. But it was with anger only. Hot-tempered, downright, this intrepid soldier, with his contempt of courts, was the bearer of a message of some peremptoriness which he did not now intend to soften.

In the moment of waiting for the Regent to follow them, the Marquis had looked with flaming eyes at d'Entragues.

"So it is true, then !" he had said in deepest bitterness.

D'Entragues had shrugged, cynical ever in words as in smile.

"What is there to grow hot about ?"

La Guiche's glance of contempt had been as a blow. Beyond that he made no answer. He disdained to waste words on this fribble. He would save what he had to say for the Prince.

And now the Prince stood before them, his big face white, his glance one of haughty annoyance.

In the common-room, which the gallery overlooked, some townsfolk sat over their cards and backgammon. The interview could not take place here within public earshot. This Monsieur at once perceived, despite his disordered condition.

"Follow me," he commanded, and led the way down the stairs.

The landlord ushered them presently into a little room on the ground floor, lighted candles from the taper which he carried, and left them.

And now the Regent, shaking himself like a turkey-cock and puffing out his chest, prepared to loose upon them his displeasure.

"It seems that I am come so low that even my privacy is to be invaded ; that there are even gentlemen of birth so indifferent to the respect that is due to my person as not to hesitate to thrust themselves upon me without leave. I will reserve what else I have to say until I hear your explanations."

La Guiche did not keep him waiting. He answered him contemptuously.

"You may not consider it worth saying, monseigneur, when you have heard. The explanations are abundant, and I warn you that they are not pleasant."

"It would surprise me if they were." The Prince actually sneered. His ill-humour vented itself blindly, as does ever the ill-humour of a stupid man. "I have almost abandoned hope of hearing any news that is not unpleasant ; so ill-served am I."

"Ill-served !" The Marquis went white to the lips. His eyes blazed. In that hour no taunt could more effectively have inflamed him, and he cast to the winds the last vestige of respect for the august person he addressed. "Ill-served does your highness say ? My God !" An instant he paused. Then he plunged recklessly into his report. "I am from Toulon, which declared for you, declared for the King three months ago. Ever since we raised the royal standard there our strength has grown. The royalists of the Midi have flocked to us ; even some who were not royalists, but whom the fall of the Girondins has exasperated against the present government, have come to join us. The English fleet under Admiral Hood is there, and troops have come to our support from Spain and from Sardinia. From Toulon it was our chance to raise the South, to stir it to a movement that would have swept France clear of her revolution.

"To accomplish this, to awaken enthusiasm, to stiffen courage, we required the presence there of one of the Princes of the Blood ; of yourself, monseigneur, who are the representative of France, the virtual head of the house for which we are fighting. The demonstration of our devotion should have sufficed to bring you to us. When it did not, we sent messenger after messenger to you, to invite you, to implore you, almost to command you, to assume your proper place at our head. As weeks passed and grew into months, and still neither your own sense of what was fitting nor our intercessions could move you, our courage began to dwindle. Men began to ask themselves how could it happen that a Prince of the Blood could be so negligent of his duty to men who were offering up their lives out of their sense of duty to him."

Violently the Regent interrupted him. "Monsieur ! You transcend all tolerable terms. I will not listen to you until you choose to address me with a proper deference. I will not listen to you."

"By God, you shall, if they are the last words I ever speak." The Marquis stood between the Regent and the door, and so commanded the situation physically. His anger gave him command of it morally as well.

"Monsieur d'Entraques, I appeal to you," cried the Prince. "To your duty to me."

The embarrassment in which Monsieur d'Entraques had

listened to La Guiche's unmeasured terms was painfully increased by this appeal.

"What can I do, monseigneur, if——"

"Nothing. You can do nothing," the Marquis harshly assured him. "Nothing except be silent."

The Regent took a step forward. The sweat gleamed on his white face. He made an imperious gesture. "Let me pass, monsieur. I will listen to no more to-night. To-morrow if you are in a better frame of mind I may receive you."

"To-morrow, monseigneur, I shall be gone. I ride again at dawn. I am on my way to Brussels, in the service of your House and your cause. So you must hear me to-night. For I have that to say which you must know."

"My God, Monsieur de La Guiche! You have the temerity to do me violence. To constrain me."

"I have a duty, monseigneur," the Marquis thundered, and he swept on. "You are to know that in the last month rumours have been growing in Toulon which do not flatter you; they have reached a pitch at which they threaten jeopardy to your cause."

"Rumours, sir?" The Regent was arrested. "What rumours?"

"It is being said that you continue absent because, whilst yonder in the South men faint and bleed and die for you, you are kept here by a woman; that you are concerned only with the unworthy pursuit of gallantry; that——"

"By God, sir! I'll not endure another instant of this . . . this outrage. The infamous lie!"

"Lie!" echoed the Marquis. "Do you say it is a lie, monseigneur? Do you say it to me, who have just come upon you in the arms of your wench?"

"D'Entraques!" The name came in a scream from the Regent's twisted lips. "Will you suffer this? Will you suffer this insult to your Prince? Compel this man to let me pass. I will not stay another instant. And I shall not forget this, Monsieur de La Guiche. Be sure that I shall not forget it."

"I desire you to remember it, monseigneur," he was fiercely answered.

And now d'Entraques bestirred himself. He stepped forward. "Monsieur le Marquis," he began, and set a hand upon La Guiche's shoulder. He was suffered to say no more. With a violent sweep of his left arm the Marquis sent him hurtling backwards until he brought up breathless against the wall.

"A moment, and I've done. I come to you, monseigneur, from the Comte de Maudet, who commands in Toulon, as you

should know. His instructions were precise. I was to see you in person, and tell you in person what is being said. I was to bid you, not on the grounds of duty, but on the grounds of honour, to attempt even at this late hour to still these rumours and repair the harm to your cause by rendering yourself at once to Toulon before it is too late; before in sheer lassitude, and despondency of fighting for one who shows so little disposition to fight for himself, those loyal men throw down their arms.

"I have done, monseigneur. This is the last summons you will receive. Even at this late hour your appearance in Toulon may revive fainting spirits and give the lie to a dishonouring rumour which it breaks my heart to know for the truth. Good-night, monseigneur."

Abruptly he turned and stepped to the door. He pulled it open.

The Regent, shaking, gasping, sweating, looked at him balefully.

"Be sure that I shall not forget a word of this, Monsieur le Marquis."

The Marquis bowed, his lips tight, passed out, and closed the door.

Stepping into the common-room, he almost stepped into the arms of the landlord, whom the raised voices had attracted to the neighbourhood.

Curtly he desired to be conducted to the chamber appointed to him for the night. There as curtly he desired to be called early, and on that cut short the landlord's solicitude for his comfort. But as the landlord was departing, the Marquis stayed him.

"What is the name of the lady in that room where I found his highness?"

"That is Mademoiselle de Kercadiou."

The Marquis echoed the name, "Kercadiou!" Then he asked: "How long has she been here? Here in Hamm?"

"Why, she arrived here from Coblenz at the same time as his highness."

The Marquis shrugged disgustedly, and on that dismissed the subject and the landlord.

Meanwhile the withdrawal of the Marquis had momentarily increased the Regent's fury. As the door closed he had swung to his remaining companion.

"D'Enragues! Will you suffer that ruffian to depart so?"

D'Enragues, almost as pale and shaken as his master by the storm through which they had passed, was making for the door when the Regent checked him.

"Stay! Wait! What does it matter? Let him go. Let him go." He shook limp hands at the end of his raised arms. "What does it matter? What does anything matter?" He reeled to a chair, and sagged down into it. He mopped his brow. He whimpered inarticulately. "Am I never to reach the bottom of this cup of bitterness? Is this plague of sansculottism so widespread that even men of birth forget their duty? What am I, d'Entragues? Am I a Prince of the Blood, or just a child of the soil, an enfant de rotture? That a man, a gentleman born, should have been such a scoundrel as to stand before my face and utter such things! D'Entragues, it is the end of the world. The end of the world!"

He whimpered again. Body bowed in dejected collapse, arms hanging limp between his knees, he sat there and wagged his great head. After a while he spoke without looking up.

"Go, d'Entragues. You were of little use when there was anything to be done. Nothing remains now. Go. Leave me."

The Count, glad to escape an atmosphere of so much discomfort, mumbled "Monseigneur!" and took his departure, closing the door softly.

The Regent sat on. Every now and then he uttered a long shuddering sigh, provoked by the memory of the terrible indignity he had suffered, by contemplation of a plight so sad that he was no longer sheltered from insult.

At long length he rose, ponderously, wearily. He stood in thought, his chin in his hand. His breathing grew steady, his heart-beats normal again. He began to recover his composure. Confidence returned. It would not always be thus. God would never permit a Prince of the Blood to live out his life in such circumstances. And when sanity was restored to the world, and each man was returned to his proper place in it, the Marquis de La Guiche should be fittingly schooled in duty and be made to pay for his presumption.

It was a heartening reflection. It made him square his shoulders, raise his head again, and resume his normal princely carriage. And it must have brought back to him the memory of that interview above-stairs so brutally interrupted in so very promising a moment. For quite suddenly, with a shrug that seemed to cast off every preoccupation, he quitted the room, crossed the outer chamber, and once more ascended the stairs.

The landlord, watching him with curiously speculative eyes, observed that he trod lightly. He continued to watch him until he had entered the apartments of Monsieur de Kercadiou. Then with a shrug the landlord went to snuff the candles.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

THE CITIZEN-AGENT

It must have been somewhere in the neighbourhood of Christmas—his notes are not precise on the point—when André-Louis left Paris on his journey into Picardy, there to assemble the material necessary for the master-stroke by which he now confidently counted upon smashing Saint-Just.

"If you succeed," de Batz had said to him at parting, "the end will be in sight. While you are gone the battle between Danton and Hébert will be fought out. The issue of that struggle is foregone. Hébert will be crushed. The Hébertists will go the way of the Girondins, and the ground will have been cleared for the final struggle for supremacy between Robespierre and Danton. Bring back the means to pull down Saint-Just in shame and disgrace, and Robespierre falls with him, torn down by a people who will by then have lost all their illusions. Before the trees are budding again in the Tuileries Gardens the throne will have been set up once more and you will be celebrating your nuptials at Gavrillac. So to it, André, with all your courage and all your wit. You carry Cæsar and his fortunes."

He carried them in a berline down to the little town of Blérancourt in the Aisne. He travelled of course as an agent of the terrible Committee of Public Safety, armed with unimpeachable credentials, and he was accompanied by the colossus Boissancourt, who went with him in the guise of secretary.

His travelling carriage drew up before the principal inn which until lately had been known as the Auberge des Lys. This, however, being a sign too closely associated with the royal standard, had recently been changed to the Auberge du Bonnet Rouge, and a Phrygian cap had now been painted over the fleurs-de-lys which had clustered on the old escutcheon.

André-Louis had dressed himself for the part with studied care. "I take the stage in character," he had informed Boissancourt. "Scaramouche never had a worthier rôle. We must not neglect the details."

These consisted of a brown frock, tight-fitting, and none too new; buckskins and knee boots with reversed tops; a tricolour sash of taffeta, which he had carefully soiled, a neckcloth loosely knotted, and a round black hat displaying a tricolour cockade. Saving that there were no plumes in his hat, and that he had replaced by a small-sword the sabre usually affected, he had all

the appearance of a representative en mission, which was the impression that he desired to create without insistence.

With the massive Boissancourt rolling solemnly after him, he swaggered into the inn with all that truculence of manner which distinguished the revolutionary officials, those despots of the new régime who modelled themselves upon their worse imaginings of the despots of the old.

Authoritatively he announced his quality and condition, presented Boissancourt as his secretary, demanded the best rooms the landlord could afford him, and desired that the Mayor of Blérancourt and the President of its Revolutionary Committee be summoned at once to attend him.

He made a terrifying stir with his short, sharp sentences, his peremptory manner and his penetrating glance. The landlord bowed himself double in servility. Would the Citizen-Emissary—he knew not how else to call him, and dared not be so familiar as to call him merely Citizen—deign to step this way. The Citizen-Emissary would understand that this was but a poor house. Blérancourt was little better than a rustic village. But such as it was the Citizen-Emissary could depend that the best it commanded would be placed at his disposal. To conduct him, the bowing landlord moved backwards before him as if he were royalty. He protested as he went. His rooms were not such as he could wish to offer the Citizen-Emissary. But the Citizen-Emissary would recognize that he was a poor man, after all, just a country landlord, and perhaps the Citizen-Emissary would not be too exigent.

The Citizen-Emissary, following the retreating, cringing vintner along the narrow stone-flagged passage, addressed his secretary.

"How times have changed, Jerome! And how much for the better. You perceive how the inspiring principles of democracy have penetrated even to this poor little rustic town. Observe the amiable deportment of this good landlord, who now fills his lungs with the pure air of liberty. How different from the base servility of the old days when the despots stalked through the land. Oh blessed Liberty! Oh glorious Equality!"

Boissancourt blinked, and choked down his laughter.

But the landlord smirked and grinned and cringed the more under that commendation, and so bowed them into a small, square room whose window opened directly on to the courtyard. It was a sitting-room. It was commonly used as a dining-room for travellers desiring to be private. But, of course, during the Citizen-Emissary's honouring visit, it would be reserved entirely

for his own use. A bedroom connected with it, and, if the Citizen-Emissary approved, there was another bedroom across the passage which might serve for the Citizen-Emissary's secretary.

The Citizen-Emissary took a turn in the room, surveying it disdainfully, his nose in the air. The walls were whitewashed. Some few pictures decorated them. The great man from Paris inspected them. One was a reproduction of David's "Death of Marat." Before this the Citizen-Emissary bowed his head as if before a shrine. Another was an entirely apocryphal portrait of Doctor Guillotin. There was a print of the Place de la Revolution with the guillotine in its midst, and a legend under it: "The National Razor for the Shaving of Traitors". There was a portrait of Mirabeau, and a cartoon representing the triumph of the people over despotism—a naked colossus with one foot upon a coroneted and another upon a mitred homunculus.

"It is very well," said the Citizen-Emissary. "If these represent your sentiments, I felicitate you."

The landlord, a mean, shrivelled little fellow, rubbed his hands in gratification. He grew voluble on the subject of his principles. The Citizen-Emissary, rudely contemptuous, interrupted him.

"Yes, yes. No need to protest so much. I shall see for myself while I am here. There is a good deal I desire to see for myself." There was something minatory in his tone and smile. The landlord observed that his eyes were bitter. He fell silent, waiting.

André-Louis ordered dinner. The landlord desired him to be particular.

"That is for you," he was told. "We have travelled, and we are hungry. See that you feed us in a manner becoming servants of the Nation. It will be a test of patriotism. After dinner I will see your Mayor and the President of your Committee. Let them be warned."

A wave of his hand dismissed the cringing rascal. Boissancourt closed the door. He subdued his deep booming voice to mutter:

"In God's name, don't overdo it."

André-Louis smiled, and Boissancourt, too, observed that André-Louis' eyes were bitter.

"That is impossible. There never have been such despots in the land as the apostles of equality. Besides, it's amusing to see these poor rats dance to the tune which they themselves have called."

"Maybe. But we are not here to amuse ourselves."

If the dinner was to be a test of patriotism, the landlord proved himself a patriot of the stoutest. There was a broth containing the essences of real meat, a tender and well-nourished capon roasted with loving care, a bottle of wine which made them dream themselves on the banks of the Garonne and the purest wheaten bread they had tasted in months. There were other things that mattered less. They were waited upon by the landlord's wife and daughter with fearful solicitude.

"Well, well. They don't starve in the country, it seems," said Boissancourt, "whatever they may do in Paris."

"Members of the government do not starve anywhere," snapped André-Louis. "That is what we are presently to demonstrate to the starving people."

After dinner, when the table had been cleared, the Mayor of Blérancourt arrived, a portly, moon-faced little man of forty, named Foulard, sandy-haired, with dark little eyes that were red and sore-looking. An air of consequence invested him. Perceiving it, André-Louis took the offensive at the outset. He did not rise to receive the Mayor. He looked at him across the table, on which some papers were now spread, and there was reproof in the glance which he fixed upon the sash of office in which that functionary's paunch was swathed.

"So you are the Mayor, eh? You're a thought too well nourished, citizen. In Paris patriots grow lean."

The Citizen Foulard was taken aback. The assurance went out of him visibly. His little eyes blinked at the massive Boissancourt standing behind André-Louis' chair. But he was too intimidated by his reception to point out that there were no signs of emaciation about the Citizen-Emissary's secretary.

"Life," he stammered, "is . . . is not so . . . so hard on us in the country."

"So I perceive. You grow fat. And you do other things. It is about these other things that I am here." Thus aggressively he took the initiative. The Mayor, who had come to question, found that it was himself was to be questioned; and before the harsh menace of that voice, the stern contempt of that lean countenance, he grew instantly submissive. "Before we come to business, Citizen-Mayor, you had better take a look at my credentials, so that you may know my authority." He took up a card from the table. It was his commission as an agent of the Committee of Public Safety. He proffered it.

The Citizen Foulard came forward almost timidly. He studied the card a moment, and returned it. "Perfectly, Citizen-Agent. Perfectly."

"And now we are waiting for your President and your Commandant." Under the table André-Louis tapped his booted foot impatiently. "You do not hurry yourselves in Blérancourt."

The door opened as he spoke, and the landlord announced: "Citizen-Emissary, the Citizen-President and the Citizen-Commandant."

They came in with airs of arrogance. Thuillier, the local despot, the provincial pro-consul, who was Saint-Just's friend and agent, was rendered very sure of himself by virtue of his intimate association with that great man. He came first, a vigorous, youthful fellow of middle height, with glossy black hair, a swarthy complexion, and an expression rendered truculent by his heavily undershot jaw. He was ill-dressed in black, and as President of the local Revolutionary Committee he was girt with a sash of office. He was closely followed by Lieutenant Lucas, who commanded the detachment of National Guards stationed in Blérancourt, and was nominally styled the Commandant. The Lieutenant was young and fair, and looked amiable. In his blue uniform with its white facings and red woollen épaulettes he had almost the air of a gentleman.

André-Louis' eyes played over them. He retained his seat, and his expression remained forbidding. Weighing the Citizen Thuillier at a glance, he did not give him time to speak, but adopted tactics similar to those which had succeeded with the Mayor.

"You have kept me waiting. In the days of the despots the time of an official might be wasted with impunity. In these days it is recognized that his time is not his own to waste. It belongs to the Nation which employs him."

Like the Mayor before him, Thuillier was visibly shaken. Formidable must be the authority of a man who permitted himself to take such a tone with the President of a Revolutionary Committee. But since Thuillier's self-assurance was better grounded than the Mayor's, it was not so easily demolished. Recovering, he spoke arrogantly.

"You do not need to instruct me in my duty, citizen."

"I trust not. But if I perceive the need, I shall not hesitate. Best look at this, Citizen-President." And again he proffered his commission.

Thuillier scanned it. He observed that among the signatures it bore was that of Saint-Just. He was impressed, the more so since he was vague on the subject of the functions of an agent of the Committee of Public Safety. He had had to deal before now

with one or two representatives en mission, and was well aware of their wide powers. An agent of the Committee of Public Safety was something new in his experience. Aware that it could not be otherwise, since agents of the committee were never sent upon such missions, André-Louis assumed that he would be taken at his own self-valuation, and that he must depend upon arrogance to establish by implication that the authority vested in him was unlimited.

"Let the Commandant see it too, so that he may know by what authority I give him orders should the need to do so arise."

Here was an encroachment. Thuillier frowned. "If you have orders for the Commandant, he will take them from the Mayor or from me."

André-Louis looked him sternly between the eyes. "As long as I am in Blérancourt, the National Guard will take its orders also from the Committee of Public Safety, through me, its agent. Let that be clear. I am not here to trifle or to argue about forms. I have business to discharge. Grave business. Let us come to it. Boissancourt, set chairs for the citizens."

They took the chairs which Boissancourt placed for them beyond the table, facing André-Louis, and the three of them looked at the Citizen-Agent and waited. The Mayor blinked his red-rimmed eyes in apprehension. Thuillier scowled haughtily. Lucas lounged, nursing his sabre, his air indifferent.

André-Louis sat back and pondered them, his expression wolfish.

"And so," he said slowly, "it seems that here in this innocent-looking little country village you permit yourselves to conspire, you harbour reactionaries, you plot against the Republic One and Indivisible."

Thuillier attempted to speak. "There has been——"

"Do not interrupt me. I am informed of what there has been. I am concerned with the business which has led to the arrest of the man Thorin."

At last full understanding dawned upon Thuillier. This agent had been sent to Blérancourt by Saint-Just himself so as to procure—manufacturing what was necessary—such evidence as would suffice to send the betrayed and inconvenient husband of Madame Thorin to the guillotine. Thuillier perceived his duty clearly. It was to work hand in hand with this very efficient agent of the Public Safety. He no longer scowled. He assumed instead a sympathetic gravity.

"Ah, yes. That is a sad case, citizen. Blérancourt blushes to think of it."

André-Louis' answer was startling. "I should think better of Blérancourt, and of you, if there were some evidence of a disposition to cut out this cancer."

"You mean?"

"Come, citizen. Do not trifle with me. Where are the proofs of this good will, of this patriotic zeal?"

"But have we not arrested this villain Thorin, and sent him to Paris for trial?"

"For conspiracy," said André-Louis pregnantly. He waited a moment. "Come, come! Where are the others? Where are this scoundrel's associates, his fellow-conspirators? Have you arrested them yet?"

Thuillier became impatient. "What are you talking about? We do not know of any others."

"You do not?" André-Louis raised his brows. Sarcasm was in his sudden smile. "You wish me to understand perhaps that in Blérancourt a man may conspire alone? That this is a peculiarity of the inhabitants of the Aisne?"

The Mayor was penetrated by the acuteness of the observation.

"Name of a name!" he ejaculated, and turned to Thuillier. "But of course the fellow must have had associates. A man does not conspire alone, as the Citizen-Agent says."

"You perceive it? I am glad there is some intelligence in Blérancourt, even if one must rummage to find it. Well, Citizen-President, you do not appear to have been very diligent. You discover that Thorin is conspiring. You arrest him for it, and you leave the matter there. You do not take the trouble to ascertain who are his fellow-conspirators. Faith! I think it is high time the Committee of Public Safety looked into the matter."

André-Louis took up a pencil, and made some notes rapidly.

The Mayor looked blank stupefaction. Thuillier sat scowling again, but dumb. He realized that the less he said the better. Things were not quite as he had supposed at first. He must leave it for his friend Saint-Just to say what there was to be said to this pert, meddlesome young agent. He wouldn't meddle much more by the time Saint-Just had done with him. Lucas maintained an easy interested air in the proceedings. He, after all, was merely the instrument of the executive, and there was no responsibility upon him for any of its blunders or shortcomings.

André-Louis looked up. Thuillier was to realize that this pert young meddler had not yet done with him.

"What was the nature of this conspiracy, Citizen-President ? Its precise nature ?"

Thuillier shifted ill-humouredly on his chair. "Do you expect me to carry all the business of my committee in my head ?"

"Why, no. Have you had many conspiracies in Blérancourt ?"

"We have had no other."

"Yet you cannot remember the nature of this, the only one ? You betray but a faint interest, I fear. You will have notes, I suppose ?"

"I don't know whether I have or not."

André-Louis raised his brows, and for a long moment stared at the President.

"Citizen, let me admonish you to be serious. This man must have been before your committee for examination."

"He was not. I examined him myself."

"That is very irregular. But even so, you must have made some notes. A note of the case. You will have that."

"Oh, I suppose I have. But how do I know where it is now ?"

"You must seek it, Citizen-President. You do not appear even yet to perceive the gravity of the matter. When we have the details of the conspiracy we should have some clue to the identity of Thorin's fellow-conspirators."

"That is true," the Mayor agreed ponderously.

"We shall be able to track down these scoundrels who are still at large to work their evil against the Republic. You perceive that, I hope, Citizen-President."

"I perceive it. Yes. I perceive it. Of course I perceive it." Thuillier was at bay. He showed his teeth. "But a thousand devils ! I tell you I have no notes."

André-Louis looked at him long and searchingly, until Thuillier got to his feet in a rage.

"Why do you stare at me ?"

"You have no notes ? What am I to understand by this ?"

Thuillier, trusting to the protection of his friend Saint-Just, on whose behalf he had acted, permitted himself to lose his temper.

"You may understand what the devil you like. I am tired of your questions. Do you think that I am to be browbeaten by a mouchard. For that is what you are, I suppose. Do you think——"

André-Louis interrupted him. "Silence, my man ! Silence ! Sainte Guillotine ! Do I represent the Committee of Public Safety, or what do I represent ? Am I to have insolences from the President of a provincial revolutionary committee Here's a

fine state of things ! Do you think I want speeches from you ? You'll answer to what I ask you, and no more. But, indeed, I don't think there is much more to ask you."

"I am glad of that, at least," said Thuillier with a toss of his dark head and in an irrepressible flash of insolence. He sat down again, and crossed his legs, a swift movement eloquent of his anger.

André-Louis looked at him keenly. Then he took up a pen, dipped it, drew a sheet of paper towards him, and wrote briskly. For a few moments there was no sound in the room but the scratching of his quill and the gusty, ill-tempered breathing of the Citizen Thuillier. At last it was done. The agent cast aside the pen, and sat back waving the sheet so as to dry the ink. Whilst he waved it, he spoke, and now not only to Thuillier, but to Foulard as well.

"The situation, then, is this : a fortnight ago the Citizen Thorin was arrested by order of the President of the Committee of Blérancourt on a charge of conspiracy, and sent to Paris to the Conciergerie, where he remains a prisoner. I am sent here to discover the nature of the conspiracy and the names of those who conspired with Thorin. The President can tell me neither the one nor the other. He informs me in insolent terms that he has no notes. It is not for me to draw inferences. The Committee of Public Safety will do that. But it is already clear that only two inferences are possible. Either the Citizen-President has been criminally negligent of his duty, or else he is concerned to shield these other plotters."

"What do you say ?" Thuillier was on his feet again.

André-Louis went on steadily and relentlessly. "It will be for the Committee to determine which inference it will adopt. Meanwhile, my own duty is quite clear. Citizen-Mayor, will you be good enough to countersign this order ?" And he held out towards Foulard the paper on which he had written.

The Mayor read ; Thuillier, his face dark with rage, stared at him, and from him to André-Louis.

"What is it ?" he asked at last.

"My God !" said the Mayor at the same moment.

"It is an order for your arrest, of course," said André-Louis.

"For my arrest ? Arrest me ? Me ?" The President recoiled. He was suddenly white under his deep tan.

"You will have perceived the necessity, Citizen-Mayor," said André-Louis.

The Citizen-Mayor licked his lips meditatively. His red-rimmed eyes were narrowed. He took up the pen. Was André-

Louis deceived, or did a smile flicker over the little man's lips as he bent to sign? It was not difficult to imagine how such a man as Thuillier, tyrannically abusing his position as President of the Revolutionary Committee, must have bullied and humiliated the Mayor, or what old scores the Mayor was now settling by that pen-stroke for which the responsibility lay elsewhere.

And then the dumbfounded Thuillier recovered himself at last.

"Are you mad? Don't sign, Foulard! Don't dare to sign! By God, man, I'll have your head for this!"

"Ha! Make a note of that threat, Boissancourt. It shall be reported with the rest. And let me remind you, Citizen Thuillier, that your own head is none so secure at this moment. You'll best protect it by a submissive conduct, reserving what else you may have to say until you come to stand your trial." He took the paper and turned to the gaping officer. "Here is your order, Citizen-Commandant. You will lodge the Citizen Thuillier in the local gaol, and you will hold him there pending my further orders. You will have him guarded by men of trust and you will see to it that he holds no communications whatever without an order from me. He is to send no letters, receive no letters, and he is to be allowed to see no one at all. You are responsible for this. I warn you that the responsibility is a heavy one."

"By God it is," said the livid Thuillier. "Some of you will have to answer for this. Some of you will lose your heads over it."

"Take him away," said André-Louis.

The Commandant saluted, and, order in hand, turned to Thuillier.

"Come, Citizen-President."

Thuillier stood there a moment, his jaws working, his lips moving, but uttering nothing. Then he shook a fist at André-Louis. "You wait, my pert jackanapes! You wait! You'll see what happens to you."

André-Louis looked at him with contempt. "I am concerned to see what happens to you, you traitor. I could foretell it with reasonable certainty."

He waved him away.

CHAPTER XXXIX

EVIDENCE

WHEN the sounds of the protesting, threatening Thuillier's removal had at last faded, André-Louis, who had risen, addressed himself to Foulard.

"What do you make of it, Citizen-Mayor?"

The paunchy little man washed his unclean hands in the air and wagged his head in grave and sorrowful condemnation.

"I do not like it. I tell you frankly, Citizen-Agent, I do not like it."

"What don't you like? Be clear, man."

The Mayor jumped. "I don't like the conduct of Thuillier. It is not frank. It is not the conduct of a patriot."

"Ha! You perceive that too. I was sure from the moment I saw you that I could count upon your intelligence. Though it isn't intelligence that is lacking in Blérancourt. It's loyalty, zeal, patriotism. You conspire here, and the President of your committee shelters the conspirators."

"You think that? You believe that?"

"Don't you?" boomed Boissancourt.

"I don't know what to think; what to believe."

André-Louis smiled unpleasantly.

"We must find you something. We may find it among that rascal's papers. Come, citizen. Show me the way to Thuillier's house. You will come with us, Boissancourt."

Thuillier had his lodging at the end of the village in a house that was set back in a tangled, neglected garden, very desolate in its present December nakedness. It was a ramshackle place kept by the Widow Grasset and her maiden sister, both women in middle life. Thuillier occupied two rooms on the ground floor. A brief survey of the bedroom justified André-Louis in dismissing it. He passed to the sitting-room where evidently Thuillier dispatched the matters concerned with his official position. There were some books on a shelf. André-Louis looked them over cursorily; a *Contrat Social*, some volumes of Voltaire's *Siècle de Louis XIV*, one or two works on philosophy, a translation of Ovid, a copy of the *Roman de la Rose*, and many others, making up a curious assortment.

A writing-table stood in the window. There were some papers upon it. He looked through them. They were of no particular account. He opened the two drawers set in it. There was nothing in them of the least consequence.

Then, the Mayor following him ever, and Boissancourt bringing up the rear, he passed to a mahogany bureau that stood in a recess of the wall. It was locked.

Having broken it open, André-Louis sat down to go through its contents. The Mayor by his invitation pulled up a chair so as to sit beside him and participate in his investigation. Boissancourt, standing on his other side, assisted as directed.

The December daylight had long since faded, and they had been working for three hours by candlelight in that chill, untidy room before they brought their labours to a close. From that rigorous sifting had resulted a little bundle of papers, which Boissancourt tied together. Then the bureau was closed again, and by André-Louis' orders the Mayor affixed his seals to it. Similarly they sealed up the two rooms, informing the startled Widow Grasset that they were not to be opened save upon an official order from the Committee of Public Safety or by its accredited representatives.

Back in his room at the Bonnet Rouge, where meanwhile a fire had been kindled to thaw the august limbs of the Citizen-Agent, André-Louis went more closely over the appropriated documents with the Mayor, whilst Boissancourt, in his capacity of secretary, sat making such notes as were required by his master.

The great prize was a letter from Saint-Just, which Thuillier had incautiously kept in spite of a note at foot enjoining him instantly to destroy it. It was a month old, its terms were deliberately vague and it made no mention of Thorin by name. But they were not so vague that when read in the light of subsequent events they left very much doubt as to the charge upon which Thorin had been arrested.

If this Pantaloon, Saint-Just wrote, continues to squeal as you now report, grave inconvenience may result to me. Purity of life is so popular at this present that I have embraced the advocacy of it. That should be enough for you. You will infer the rest, and understand the inconveniences. Something must be done. No use to write to me to order things differently here. Even if I were to do so, this man could still be mischievous. His silence must be ensured. I leave it to your wits to discover the way. Take counsel at need with B.S.J. You may both depend upon my gratitude.

*Greetings and fraternity,
Your life-long friend, F. Saint-Just.*

On matters hinted in this letter, André-Louis proceeded to an examination of the Mayor.

"Pantaloön in the comedy is always a poor cuckold. That a cuckold is in question is confirmed by the next sentence. What cuckold here in Blérancourt could be inconvenient to the Representative Saint-Just?"

This was putting a pistol to the Mayor's head. However fearful Foulard might be, he could not elude it.

"There was Thorin."

"Thorin!" André-Louis affected astonishment. "Thorin! But that is the name of this conspirator."

"Just so," said the Mayor.

"The man whose silence must be ensured. Do you know, Citizen-Mayor, that it begins to look as if there was here a conspiracy of quite another sort. Thuillier, who discovered it, cannot tell us what it was about, or who was in it, save this unfortunate Thorin. What is the truth about Thorin? What is his story?"

Out it came. It was known in the village that Saint-Just had seduced Thorin's wife. Since his going to Paris she had disappeared, and it was rumoured that she had followed him, and that he kept her there.

Boissancourt wrote briskly, reducing the statement to writing.

André-Louis offered a comment. "A nice story concerning one who has embraced the advocacy of purity, which is now so popular." He passed on.

"Then this B.S.J. There are two notes here signed with these initials. In one B.S.J. suggests that some person or other unnamed should be placed under arrest. In the other, as if answering a question, he writes: 'How do I know what you should do with him? In your place I would send him to Soissons to be guillotined.' That may allude to the unfortunate Thorin. Who is this B.S.J.? Do you surmise?"

"It must be Bontemps; a fellow named Bontemps who lives at Chaume, who calls himself Bontemps Saint-Just."

"Calls himself? What do you mean?"

"He is a relative of the Representative Saint-Just. It'll be his right to call himself that, no doubt. But he's more generally known as Bontemps."

"What's his station in life?"

"He'll be a horse-leech by trade. But he's farming now. He's come by a deal of émigré property lately." The Mayor seemed almost to sneer.

André-Louis looked up, sharply alert.

"What do you mean with your come-by? He's bought it, I suppose."

"I suppose he has. But I never heard tell that he had any money."

Keener grew the eyes of André-Louis.

"This is interesting. The fellow has no money. Yet he buys land."

"Oh, a deal of land, all round La Beauce. A deal of land."

The Citizen-Agent was thoughtfully silent a while.

"It might be as well to have a talk with this Bontemps Saint-Just," he said at last. "He had better explain these notes." Then he changed the subject. "To return to Thorin. What do you know about him?"

"Nothing to his good. A ne'er-do-well, a drunkard, a wife-beater. Small blame to his wife for going off with the Citizen Saint-Just. And that's why so little has been heard of it. No one was sorry when he was laid by the heels."

André-Louis was stern. "Whatever he may have been does not lessen the offence of swearing away his life on a false charge."

"I am not saying so, Citizen-Agent," quavered the Mayor.

"What relations does he possess?"

"A married sister. She's over in Chaume, too. And there's a cousin of his in the village here."

"Ah!" André-Louis stood up. "Let them wait until to-morrow. It is close upon midnight. You will seek me here in the morning at nine o'clock, Citizen-Mayor. We shall have a busy day before us. Boissancourt, put these papers away in safety. Good night, Citizen-Mayor."

Foulard took his departure, a weary man, glad to escape at last from the presence of that terrible agent of the Committee of Public Safety.

André-Louis and Boissancourt smiled at each other.

"By God, you're brisk!" said Boissancourt.

"It's in the part of Scaramouche. He succeeds by forestalling. It was imperative to arrest Thuillier at once so as to prevent him from communicating with Paris. The rest was the reward of virtue, and the highest reward of all was to discover the end of this thread that leads to the Citizen Bontemps. We should find there far more than ever I hoped or suspected when I came to Blérancourt."

They did. They rode out to Chaume on the following morning, accompanied by the Mayor, the Commandant, and six troopers of the National Guard. Soon after ten they were at the gates of the diminutive but elegant château which was one of the recent acquisitions of Bontemps and wherein he had taken up his residence. Its original owner, the Vicomte de La Beauce, had

been guillotined some months ago, and the legitimate heir was somewhere in exile.

Bontemps himself emerged at the clatter of their arrival in the courtyard. Dressed like a peasant, he was a young man of thirty, tall and vigorous, and with a face that was everywhere full save in the chin. The result was a rather foolish and weakly expression. But there was no weakness in the terms he used, when the Commandant announced to him that by order of the Committee of Public Safety he was under arrest. Having exploded into a succession of vehement minatory questions, such as whether they had by any chance gone mad, whether they had counted the cost of what they did, whether they were aware of his relationship with the Representative Saint-Just, what they thought the representative would have to say with them for this egregious error, he came at last to a relevant demand to know the grounds upon which he was arrested.

André-Louis stood truculently before him. He had cocked his round hat in front and plastered the tricolour cockade upon the face of it. "The grounds will be fully established by the time we have gone through your papers."

The chinless countenance of Bontemps changed colour and went slack. But in a moment he had rallied.

"If you depend on that, it means you have no charge. How can you arrest me without formulating a charge? You are abusing your authority, if, indeed, you have any. You are committing an outrage, for which you shall answer."

"You know too much law for an honest man," said André-Louis. "And, anyway, it's out of date. Have you never heard of the Law of Suspects? We arrest you under that. On suspicion."

"You won't allay it by violence," said Boissancourt. "Best take it quietly."

Bontemps appealed to the Mayor. The Mayor answered him in a paraphrase of the words of Boissancourt, and Bontemps, growing prudently sullen, was locked in a room with a guard at the door and another under the window.

André-Louis wasted no time in questioning the two men and the elderly woman who made up the household of Bontemps. He desired of them no more than an indication of where the Citizen Bontemps kept his papers. They spent three hours ransacking them, the Mayor and Boissancourt assisting André-Louis in his search. When it was complete, and André-Louis had found what he sought, certain notes and one or two letters relating to the purchase of the La Beauce lands, they dined on the best that

the little château could supply them ; an omelette, a dish of partridges, a couple of bottles of the best wine in Bontemps' well-stocked cellar.

"He's just a damned aristocrat it seems, this Bontemps," was all the thanks André-Louis bestowed on the household for that excellent repast.

Then he had the table cleared, and improvised a tribunal in the pleasant dining-room, which was brightened by the wintry sunshine. Writing materials were placed on the table. André-Louis disposed himself in an armchair before it, with Boissancourt pen in hand on his right, and the Mayor of Blérancourt on his left.

Bontemps, pale, ill at ease and sullen, was brought in under guard. The Commandant lounged in the background, an official spectator.

The examination began. Bontemps was formally asked his name, age, condition, place of abode and occupation, and his answers were set down by Boissancourt. To the last question he replied that he was a proprietor and farmer.

"How long have you been that?" was the inconvenient question.

Bontemps hesitated, then answered. "For the last year."

"And before that ? What were you ?"

"A horse-leech."

André-Louis looked at him appraisingly. "I understand that your patrimony was negligible. You are a young man, Citizen Bontemps. How long did you practise as a horse-leech ?"

"Five or six years."

"Hardly the time in which to amass a fortune. But you were thrifty, I suppose. You saved money. How much did you save ?"

Bontemps shrugged ill-humouredly. "What the devil do I know what I saved. I keep no accounts."

"On the contrary I have a good many accounts before me here which you have kept. Don't waste my time, citizen. Answer me. How much did you save ?"

Bontemps became rebellious. "What is your right to question me ? You're a damned spy of the committee's, not a judge. You have no authority to try me. It may be within your powers to arrest me, though I doubt even that. And anyway, when the Citizen-Representative Saint-Just comes to hear of it, you'll have a bad quarter of an hour, I promise you. Meanwhile, my friend, the most you can do, the most you dare do is to send me to Paris for trial. Send me, then. Send me, and be

damned to you. For I am answering none of your questions. Citizen-Mayor, are you going to abet this fellow? Name of God! You had better go carefully. You had better be warned. The guillotine goes briskly in Paris. You may come to acquaintance with it for this outrage. The Citizen-Representative Saint-Just will require a strict account of you. That's not a man with whom it's safe to trifle, as you should know."

He paused, flushed now with the excitement that had welled up in him whilst he declaimed.

André-Louis spoke quietly to Boissancourt. "Set it all down. Every word of it." He waited until the pretended secretary had ceased to write, then he turned again to the prisoner. He spoke for once very quietly without any of the truculence he had hitherto employed. Perhaps because of the contrast his tone was the more impressive.

"You labour under an error based on the old forms of law. I have said that you know too much law, but that it is out of date. If you are an honest man you will give me every help in deciding whether you are to be sent for trial or not to Soissons. For that is where you will be sent. Not to Paris. The guillotine goes just as briskly in Soissons. As for the Citizen-Representative Saint-Just, upon whose protection you seem to count, you are not to suppose that under the present rule of fraternity and equality there is any man in the State with power to protect a malefactor." His tone hardened again. "I have said that your notions are out of date. You seem under the impression that we are still living in the age of the despots. One other thing. Let me tell you that unless you can dispel the suspicions to which these papers of yours give rise, unless you can satisfactorily explain certain unfavourable circumstances which they suggest, the Citizen-Representative Saint-Just will be fully occupied in answering for himself." With a sudden fierceness, he added, bringing his fist down upon the table as he spoke. "The Republic is no respecter of persons. Get that into your head, Citizen Bontemps. Liberty, equality, and fraternity are not idle words."

The Mayor mumbled eager agreement. He went on to urge the prisoner to answer and to clear himself.

"I can't perceive," said André-Louis, "why you should hesitate, unless it is out of some false sense of loyalty. False, because no loyalty can save the principal offender. All that you can accomplish by silence and resistance is to find yourself convicted as a full accessory."

Bontemps was not merely cowed; he was visibly frightened.

André-Louis' fierce threat shook his confidence in the protection which Saint-Just might be able to afford him. If that protection were removed then was he lost indeed.

"Name of God!" he broke out. "Of what is it that you accuse me? You have not told me even that. I have done nothing for myself."

"You described yourself as a proprietor and farmer. I desire to know the source of the wealth which has enabled you to acquire these extensive tracts of land in La Beauce."

"I described myself wrongly, then." Fear squeezed the truth from him. "A farmer, yes. I have become a farmer. It is more lucrative than being a horse-leech. But a proprietor, no. I am an agent, no more. What use to question me? You have my papers. They will have shown you that I am no more than an agent."

"Whose agent?"

Bontemps still hesitated for a moment. He wrung his hands. Although the air of the room was so cold that their breathing made a mist upon it, yet there were beads of sweat on his pale, bulging brow below the straggle of red-brown hair. At last he answered. "The Citizen-Representative Saint-Just's." As if to excuse the betrayal wrung from him, he added: "The papers must have shown it."

André-Louis nodded. "They do. At least, they indicate it very strongly." Again he waited for Boissancourt to finish writing.

"In the course of the last year, you appear to have received moneys which will aggregate to close upon half a million francs if we make the computation reducing all to the present depreciated values of the Republic's currency."

"If you compute it in that way, I suppose it would amount to about that figure."

"One particularly heavy remittance of a hundred thousand francs reached you only a month ago."

"Yes. Just about a month ago."

"On the seventh of Frimaire, to be exact."

"If you have the date, why question me?"

"This money was sent to you from Strasbourg, I think."

"I don't know."

"You know whence the Citizen Saint-Just wrote. For it was he who sent it to you, was it no?"

"Yes. It came from him. It came from Strasbourg, I believe. Yes. Anything else?"

André-Louis sat back. "Set it all down, Boissancourt.

Every word of it. It is important." He turned to the Mayor. "I am discovering much more than I bargained for ; a conspiracy of quite another sort from that which I came to investigate. At the beginning of Frimaire the Citizen Saint-Just was in Strasbourg. He was levying heavy punitive fines there. Gold was flowing into his hands to be held in trust by him for the National Treasury, money destined to relieve the sufferings of the faithful people. The Citizen Saint-Just appears to have misappropriated some of this to his own uses. That is what emerges from this investigation. You might add a note to that effect, Boissancourt, for reference later. And take care of these documents. They supply the evidence." He paused, considering for a moment. "That, I think, will do for the moment. I have no more questions. You may remove the prisoner."

Boissancourt finished writing, and presented the minute of the examination to André-Louis. He read it carefully, and signed it. Then he passed it to the Mayor for his counter-signature, which was supplied so soon as the Mayor had also satisfied himself that the statement was exact. He looked pale and scared when he set down the pen.

"Name of a name! You have stirred up some terrible matters, citizen."

"And it's my belief we are only at the beginning of them."

The Mayor shivered. After all, the sunlight had passed from the room, and it was very cold there. "We are treading very dangerous ground, citizen."

André-Louis stood up. "Very dangerous to malefactors," he answered with a hardness that reassured the Mayor. "Very dangerous to false patriots who cheat the Republic of her dues, who abuse their office to serve private interests. There is no danger to any other. The Nation will know how to reward those who labour to destroy corruption. There should be great things in store for you, Citizen-Mayor. I hope that you deserve your good fortune."

"I have always been a good patriot."

"I am glad to hear it. Do your duty and fear nothing. *Fiat officium, ruat coelum.* Let us be going. You will order the Commandant to bring along this fellow Bontemps, and to bestow him safely in the gaol at Blérancourt until we send for him."

CHAPTER XL

THE DOSSIER

IN what was still to do at Blérancourt, André-Louis employed a feverish diligence. For he never lost sight of the fact that if a rumour of his activities should reach Paris there would be an abrupt end to his investigations, and his head would probably pay the price of his assumptions of authority. Therefore it was necessary to complete the work with all speed before discovery overtook him.

Also, as the days passed, the members of the Revolutionary Committee, whose President he had arrested, began to grow restive. It may be that these gentlemen were none too easy in their consciences, and not knowing where these investigations, which seemed to be spreading in ever-widening circles, could come to an end, began to be fearful on their own account. They began to question among themselves the extent of the authority of this agent of the Committee of Public Safety. Fortunately, the Mayor stood his friend, and gave him timely warning of these mutterings.

André-Louis took instant action. He ordered the committee to be convened, and appeared before it. The ten members composing it—all of them local tradesmen—rose to receive him when he briskly entered the room in the Mayor's house where they were assembled, Foulard, himself, amongst them.

Peremptorily André-Louis ordered them to sit, and himself remained standing. The histrion in him knew that thus he would more effectively dominate them. He planted his feet wide, set his hands behind him, and, hat on head, scowled upon them with those dark eyes of his which he could render so bitter. Thus for a long, almost breathless moment in which he seemed to be weighing them. Then his voice, harsh and arrogant, lashed them without mercy.

"I hear of grumbings amongst you, citizens. It has come to my knowledge that some of you take the view that I am exceeding my authority; that you resent the extent to which I am searching into events that have been happening here in Blérancourt. Let me give you a timely word of warning. If you have a care for your heads, you will heed it. If you had a proper sense of duty to the Republic, a proper patriotism, you would welcome researches whose aim is to uproot that which is noxious to the common welfare; you would welcome all steps, even though they should transcend the bounds of my authority, which are calculated to serve that aim. But let me tell you that far from

exceeding my authority I have not yet exerted it to the full. An agent of the Committee of Public Safety is vested with the powers of the Committee itself, and responsible only to the Committee for his actions. If you desire to test my powers to the full, continue to question them. I may then extend my investigations into the affairs of the questioners. For it will be my duty to assume that who resents my inquisitions has in his own conduct cause to fear them." He paused to let that inference sink home. They sat silent and a little abashed, looking furtively at one another.

He resumed with an increase of asperity. "If I do not instantly proceed to discover who are the grumblers, and to look into their affairs, it is because my hands are full already. I am content at present to confine myself to the task entrusted to me by the Committee, and to such matters as may arise directly out of it. But at the first sign of any obstacle placed in my way, of any hostile criticism of my actions which might have the result of creating difficulties for me, I shall pursue my critic without mercy or scruple. I will show you, citizens, if you give me reason to think it necessary, that the cause of liberty is not to be denied or impeded. I will show you this, if I have to take off some of your heads to make it clear. There's nothing like blood to wash away mutiny. And mutinous heads are best bestowed in the executioner's basket. Bear that in mind, citizens, and do not give me cause to speak to you again, or it will be in a very different tone."

He paused again. He saw in their hang-dog looks that he had cowed them.

"If any of you has anything to say to me, let him take this opportunity. If any of you has any complaint to voice, let him do so fearlessly and frankly now."

A lantern-jawed fellow named Prieur, a grocer in the village, who in these rhetorical days had developed certain gifts of rustic oratory, shambled to his feet. He rose to reassure the Citizen-Agent that here all were loyal servants of the Committee of Public Safety; that far from placing any obstacles in his path or criticizing the measures which in his wisdom he thought fit to take on the Committee's behalf, their anxiety was to afford him every facility for the full performance of his duty. He went on to assure the Citizen-Agent that no man present had any ground upon which to fear the closest investigation of his actions. Whatever he might have added further was never uttered for there André-Louis rudely interrupted him.

"Do you make yourself the sponsor of your colleagues? How can you do that? Speak to your own affairs my friend, if you want me to attach credit to your words."

Abashed, Prieur could only repeat in faltering accents his opening assurances. When he sat down another rose to say precisely the same thing, and after him a third, whom André-Louis refused to hear.

"Am I to listen to each of you in turn assuring me of your loyalty? I have not the time to waste. And what are words? Let rather your actions afford me evidence of your civic virtues."

Upon that he wished them a good day, and abruptly left them.

They gave him no more trouble. On the contrary, after that interview, each member of the Revolutionary Committee vied with his colleagues to display a helpful zeal.

Nevertheless, André-Louis made all haste to complete the evidence of the formidable case he was preparing. At the end of a week he was in a position to take the final step.

Again he ordered the Mayor to convene the Revolutionary Committee. He constituted it into a court of inquiry, and elected to preside over it himself. He commanded that Thuillier and Bontemps should be brought before it.

Before admitting either, however, he had a statement to make and a question to ask.

"You have been brought here to examine the apparently anti-civic conduct of two citizens of the district, one of whom, Thuillier, is your own President. The aim of your inquiry is to determine whether they are to be sent for trial, or whether, their conduct satisfactorily explained, they may be restored to liberty.

"The Citizen Thuillier ordered the arrest here a month or so ago of a man named Thorin whom he charged with conspiracy. Thuillier himself signed the order for this man's arrest, and it was countersigned of necessity by one of you. The Citizen-Commandant Lucas does not at this date remember by whom the order was countersigned. I shall be glad if he who countersigned it will now disclose himself."

There was a pause. André-Louis did not permit it to be unduly protracted.

"I can, of course, send to Paris for the order itself, and thus ascertain. But it will save time and trouble, and it may also avoid suspicion attaching to him, if the member in question will frankly declare himself."

Prieur cleared his throat, and leaned forward in his place at that long table. "I believe I countersigned that order."

"You believe?"

"I countersigned so many that I hesitate to be more precise. But I am almost sure of the order for Thorin's arrest."

"You are almost sure? Stand up, citizen. Come now. You must be quite sure. Thuillier must have said something to impress it upon your memory. He must have urged some good reason for this step. That is what I desire to know."

"Ah yes. I remember now." The Adam's apple in Prieur's stringy throat rose and fell as he swallowed hard. His knuckly hand moved nervously on the green baize cloth that covered the table against which he leaned. "I remember. Yes, of course. Thuillier told me that Thorin had been guilty of conspiring against the Republic."

"Was that all he told you? Surely he must have satisfied you that this was true before you signed away a man's life? Come, citizen. You have nothing to fear if only you will be frank with the committee. It will, I know, be clear that you have been victimized. Thuillier was your President. It was natural that you should repose confidence in his word. But there must have been something more than his word."

"He told me that he acted upon orders from Paris?"

"Paris could know nothing of a conspiracy in Blérancourt save upon information from Blérancourt. You see that, Citizen Prieur?"

"Oh yes. I see that. I see that now. Now that you mention it."

"But you did not see it at the time?"

"I trusted the Citizen-President."

"That is what I have been supposing." André-Louis for once was amiable. "But he must have said whose were the orders he had received from Paris?"

Prieur looked desperately round him. He found all eyes turned upon him, and all were grave. Some seemed to condemn him. He swallowed again, and at last decided to answer.

"He told me that the orders were from the Citizen-Representative Saint-Just."

There was a lively stir, and some murmurings at the mention of that formidable name. Boissancourt, at the table's end, wrote down the answer.

"Did he tell you anything of the nature of the conspiracy?"

"Nothing, Citizen-Agent. I asked, naturally. He answered that it was none of my business."

"It did not occur to you that it was very much your business? That if there was a conspiracy here, there must be other conspirators, and that the arrests could not be confined to this Thorin? This did not occur to you, Citizen Prieur?" André-

Louis had resumed his Rhadamanthine manner. Prieur's uneasiness increased.

"It may have passed through my mind. But the Citizen-President was insistent, and . . . and . . ."

"He coerced you, you would say?"

Prieur nodded slowly. "It comes to that, I suppose."

André-Louis looked at him in silence. Then abruptly he shifted his ground.

"Let us pass on. The order was from the Citizen-Representative Saint-Just. Tell me, citizen, had you ever before heard the name of this man Thorin connected in any way with that of Saint-Just?"

"I had heard what everybody in Blérancourt has heard. Thorin made no secret of his trouble. He accused Saint-Just of having seduced his wife, of having taken her to Paris, where it is said that he keeps her now. Anyone in Blérancourt will tell you this."

"Ah! It explains a note from Saint-Just found among the papers of Thuillier. Yes, I think it explains it completely. You have that, Boissancourt?" He paused. He was smiling a little. "It is practically established that there has, indeed, been a conspiracy with which Thorin is connected. But he seems to be connected with it rather as the victim. You may sit down, Citizen Prieur. Citizen-Commandant, order Thuillier to be brought before us."

Prieur sank down limply into his seat. His colleagues surveyed him between censure and compassion.

Thuillier was brought in between guards. He walked firmly, his head high, his glance arrogant, his jaw more prominent than ever.

He broke into menaces, uttered with a deal of foulness, as to what would happen to them all when his friends in Paris came to know of this. André-Louis let him run on. Then with a crooked smile he turned to the committee.

"You hear his assurances, his confidence in his friends in Paris—by which he means his friend in Paris. This unhappy Thuillier is under the delusion that the rule of tyranny still prevails in France; that there has merely been a change of tyrants. He and his friend in Paris are likely very soon to discover their error." To the prisoner he added: "My secretary, there, is setting down every word you utter. So you had better weigh your words carefully, because the Committee of Public Safety will certainly weigh them. In fact, if you will accept a piece of friendly advice, you will be silent. You have been brought here not to speak, but to listen."

Thuillier glowered at him, but prudently accepted his advice.

André-Louis was brief. "There is no need to question you. The case is complete. It is established—very fully established—by the documents found in your possession, which I have here, and by the evidence of a member of this committee, that you arrested Thorin and sent him to Paris upon orders from the Citizen Saint-Just. That the charge of conspiracy upon which he was arrested was entirely false is also established by the utter lack of evidence of any conspiracy at all, and by the fact that no other arrest has been made on this ground. As I pointed out to you before, a man cannot conspire alone. Seeking further, we find in these sworn statements of Thorin's sister and Thorin's cousin, that the Representative Saint-Just carried off the wife of this Thorin and has kept her under his protection in Paris. All the village can testify that Thorin was raging and complaining in a manner likely to bring the Representative Saint-Just into deserved disrepute. The Citizen Saint-Just's despotic act in having this man thrown into prison is at once explained.

"The Representative Saint-Just will have to answer for himself when I lay my report before the Committee of Public Safety. You will have to answer for having been his accomplice in this abhorrent act of tyranny, in this loathsome abuse of trust. If you have anything to say that will mitigate your part this is your opportunity."

"I have nothing to say." Thuillier grimaced in his rage. "These are all rash assumptions, for which your head may have to pay. You are meddling in dangerous matters, citizen, as you will discover. So are you all, you imbeciles! Do this man's bidding like a pack of silly sheep, and like a pack of silly sheep you'll come to the shambles for it."

"Take him out," André-Louis commanded. "Take him back to gaol, and let him lie there until orders concerning him come from Paris."

Thuillier, swearing and threatening to the end, was dragged out by his guards.

Next Bontemps was introduced. André-Louis made even shorter work of him. It was established that in the course of the last year he had acquired lands in La Beauce to the value of close upon a half million francs. It was also established by documents found in his possession that in this he had merely acted as the agent for the Citizen-Representative Saint-Just, who had supplied him the money for these enormous purchases. The lands in question had thus become the property of Saint-Just. They were

registered in the name of Bontemps merely so that Saint-Just's dishonest acquisitions should not be disclosed.

Bontemps admitted it.

Summaries of his case and of that of Thuillier having been drawn up by Boissancourt, André-Louis required the signatures to them of every member of the present committee.

That completed the formidable dossier, with which at last André-Louis departed from Blérancourt, leaving behind him a little township shaken to its foundations by his passage. Armed with the dossier he counted upon shaking Paris as effectively.

CHAPTER XLI

THE THUNDERBOLT

It was in mid-Nivôse—which is to say, in the early days of the New Year—when André-Louis reappeared in Paris.

His return was opportune, and the hour fully ripe for that which he came back to do.

The contest between the parties of anarchy and moderation, the bitter struggle between the foul Hébert and the Titanic Danton touched its end. Feeling himself crushed under the weight of Danton's oratory which held him up to derision, as an imbecile who succeeded only in making the revolution an object of hatred and ridicule, Hébert in his madness attempted to head an insurrection.

That was the end of him.

Beholding him stagger and desiring to speed his end, Robespierre roused himself from the inert vigilance in which hitherto he had observed the combat of his two rivals. Foreseeing his own trial of strength with the survivor, which must follow, he loosed now his valiant henchman Saint-Just against Hébert. This terrible young man, with the golden head and the liquid eyes through which his sadic soul looked out compassionately upon the world, delivered the death-blow in a speech of burning impassioned eloquence in which purity and virtue were flaunted like banners in the wind.

Hébert and those associated with him were arrested for conspiracy to the State. Their doom was sealed.

And so, at last, the lists were cleared for the final struggle for supremacy. Already Dantonists and Robespierrists were buckling their harness. If Danton prevailed it was, as we know, the view of de Batz that he might be won to play in France the part that Monk had played in England, and lend his influence to the restoration of the throne. But if the fall of Robespierre could be brought about in such a way as to cover his party with infamy, in such a way as to make clear to the famished people that they had been deluded by a gang of corrupt self-seeking scoundrels, whose doctrines of equality and fraternity had been so much hypocrisy employed to magnify themselves, then the hopes of de Batz would be changed to certainty. The end of the revolution and the revolutionaries would be assured.

You conceive, therefore, how breathless was his greeting of André-Louis on his return from Blérancourt, how eager his demands for news of how the adventure there had sped, what fruits it had borne.

There exists among the papers of André-Louis Moreau the draft of an article which he had prepared for the *Vieux Cordelier*. This draft he now laid before de Batz. Here are the terms of it.

Citizens. If chaos is upon the face of the land and starvation in your midst it is because the despotism from which you hoped to deliver France when you gave her a constitution, has had no other result than to substitute one set of tyrants for another. The fault does not lie in the constitution. Properly administered it would have borne all the rich fruits expected of it. But the constitution has not been properly administered. The government has been in the hands of self-seeking scoundrels, corrupt and hypocritical, whose only object has been to serve their own interests, abuse their sacred trust, and enrich themselves at the price of your own starvation.

When it became necessary for the party of the Mountain to which François Chabot belonged for the Robespierrists amongst whom he was regarded as a leader to exculpate themselves from the stain which his villainy had cast upon them all, there was none more eloquent in expressing abhorrence of that man's misdeeds than the Representative Florelle de Saint Just. It was Saint Just more than any other who by his denunciations of Chabot and his fellow conspirators against the public welfare, calmed your just wrath and restored your shaken faith in the National Convention. Saint-Just convinced you that with the removal of those scoundrels the work of purification was complete, and he promised you under a purer government a speedy end to the misery which he cajoled you into continuing out of patriotism to endure. You listened to him where you might not have listened to another, because he had known how to persuade you that he was the soul of truth and the mirror of purity in his private as in his public life. In your eyes Saint-Just affected the austerity of Scipio. In the Convention, when questions of public morals are to be debated, Saint-Just is ever given the lead out of regard for his virtues even more than for his talents.

It is my task, citizens to pluck the mask from this arch-hypocrite, this fidus Achates of the Incorruptible Robespierre. I accuse this public idol,

this false Republican this ci-devant Chevalier de Saint-Just of a corruption infinitely deeper, of abuses infinitely more scandalous than any of those for which he denounced Chabot and Chabot's colleagues in rascality

I hold proofs complete and overwhelming, that this wolf in sheep's wool, this aristocrat in a tricolour cockade, this ci-devant Chevalier de Saint-Just, is true to the worst form of the aristocratic stock from which he springs

Under the old régime, no privilege was more terrible, no power more odious than that by which an innocent but inconvenient man might be flung into prison under a letter of cachet and left to rot there without trial, forgotten, blotted out, dead whilst still alive. This abomination the Chevalier de Saint-Just has dared to revive for his own inexpressibly vile purposes. Of this abuse of a power entrusted to him in the name of Liberty and of the service of humanity the ci-devant Chevalier de Saint-Just is guilty. On a false charge he has caused the arrest and imprisonment of a man who was inconvenient to him, a man whom he feared because it was in that man's power and it was that man's right to denounce the debauchery of this Apostle of morality this austere professor of all the virtues

Here follows in detail the story of Thorin an account of Saint-Just's secret relations with Thorin's wife, and an insistence upon the circumstance that Saint-Just is betrothed in marriage to the sister of the Representative Lebas

Then comes the story of the plundered half-million and of the broad acres at La Beauce acquired by Saint-Just in the name of his agent and relative Bontemps a subterfuge which must have left his misappropriations undetected but for an accidental discovery at Blérancourt made in the course of investigating the case of the Citizen Thorin

The article closes with a brief peroration in which the sufferings of the people are subtly stressed the corruption which has caused it is bitterly denounced and the head of this corrupt hypocrite is demanded

De Batz read that note to the end with quickened pulses and a flush upon his sallow face. His eyes were gleaming when he looked up into André-Louis'

'And the proofs of this? The proofs?' he asked half-fearfully, from sheer incredulity

André-Louis displayed a roll of documents bound with tape

'They are all here. For every word in that note there is more than proof. Depositions of Thorin's sister and his cousin concerning the relations between Thorin's wife and Saint-Just. Notes of proceedings, and admissions of Thuillier and of Bontemps all duly attested. Documents found among the papers of Thuillier particularly a letter in Saint-Just's hand instructing him in the matter of Thorin's arrest and suppression. Documents found among the papers of Bontemps, corroborating his attested

admissions that he had purchased in his own name land to the value of half a million francs for Saint-Just. All are here. Nor is that the end of the evidence. Thorin's cousin and sister may be brought from Blérancourt to testify. Thorin himself will have to be produced and heard. Thuillier and Bontemps are in gaol at Blérancourt whence they will have to be brought before the Convention to give evidence. It is complete. The avalanche must follow upon publication."

De Batz trembled with agitation. "My God! My God! This more than compensates for the fall of Toulon. No royalist victory there could have been worth as much as this. It's a miracle. We have them. The Chabot business scarcely cold, and now this! It's not merely the end of the Robespierrists, it's the end of the revolution. This thunderbolt when it falls will shatter the convention. It could not come more seasonably. The people are at the end of their endurance. Do you imagine that they will consent to continue to starve to keep these rascals in power? By God, I'll get my men to work as they have never worked before. If we can't drive Paris into a frenzy over this, then I'm a fool."

He set a hand on André-Louis' shoulder and smiled into his eyes. "You have done well, my kingmaker. It was your dream from the outset that day at Hamm. It is your hand and your wits that have made the dream a reality that have forged this thunderbolt. And yours, André, shall be the credit. If there is any gratitude at all in princes rich shall be your reward."

"Yes," said André-Louis with a wistful smile. "Rich it shall be, for it brings me all the riches that I covet. It brings me Aline. Aline, at last, at long last."

De Batz laughed like a boy as he clapped him on the shoulder. "My dear Romantic!" he ejaculated.

"It moves your mockery, eh, Jean?"

"My mockery? No. My wonder." He grew sober. "Perhaps my envy. Who knows? If ever I had possessed such an inspiration to high endeavour I might have accounted, as you do, all other ambitions mean. I can understand it if I have never experienced it. God bring you to your heart's desire, mon petit. You have earned it, and one day soon the King of France shall thank you." He took up the bundle of documents which André-Louis had cast upon the table. "Bestow these in safety until Desmoulins come to look them over in the morning. I'll send him word by Tissot."

There was a cabinet in a corner of the room, a rococo piece of the time of the fifteenth Louis, veneered in mahogany with

Arcadian landscapes painted in its panels. Inside, one half of the back was secretly contrived to slide across the other half, disclosing a recess in the wall, where de Batz concealed all compromising papers. Of this cabinet each of them possessed a key, and it was in the recess behind it that André-Louis now bestowed those precious documents.

That done, he left the house to go and pay a visit to the Chevalier de Pomelles, at Bourg-Egalité, not as de Batz supposed with the object of informing him of his success at Blérancourt, but because of his consuming anxiety for direct news of Mademoiselle de Kercadiou. Surely by now some messenger would have arrived in Paris bearing the answer which he had begged to his last letter.

De Batz let him go. He might even have accompanied him if it had not been that the immediate consequences of André-Louis' return were to make him very busy. There was much to do to prepare his agents for the inflammatory campaign that would lie before them in the course of the next few days, as soon as they should have flung their bombshell; and de Batz would not waste a moment, now that he had something definite upon which to go to work.

He was still busy when André-Louis returned after nightfall. Yet absorbed as he was in the task to which he had set his wits and his hands, he did not on that account fail to observe the dejection in the young man's countenance. The earlier eagerness seemed all to have departed out of him; of the exhilaration begotten of his success there was no sign remaining.

At first de Batz misread these signs. "You are overtired, André. You should have left Pomelles until to-morrow."

André-Louis flung off his cloak, and stepped to the blazing fire. He stood with his hand upon the overmantel, leaning his forehead on his arm.

"I am not tired, Jean. I am disheartened. I came back in such confidence that by now at last there would be this sorely-awaited letter. And there is nothing."

"So that was why you were in such haste to seek Pomelles?"

"It passes all understanding. Two couriers have come from Hamm since Langéac arrived there with my letter. Yet there is no word from her." He wheeled to face de Batz. "My God! Do you know that it is almost more than I can bear. It is close upon a year since we parted, and in all this time, whilst I have written letter after letter, I never received a single line. I have been patient, and I have kept my wits on what there was to do. But behind it all there has ever been an ache, a yearning." He

broke off with an impatient gesture. "Oh, talking will not help."

De Batz desired to comfort him.

"My dear André, consider that this silence probably results from a fear that if a letter were to miscarry it might betray you."

"I did consider it. That is why in my last I begged definitely, insistently, for be it no more than two lines over her initials. It is not like Aline to ignore such a request."

"Yet the explanation may be a simple one. And meanwhile you have been assured by almost every messenger arriving from Hamm that Mademoiselle de Kercadiou is well. Langéac had seen her just before he last came to Paris, a couple of months ago. That should reassure you."

"It does not. It makes it all the more odd." He turned again, and once more leaned his forehead on his arm.

The Baron rose and went to set an arm affectionately about his shoulders.

"Come, child, you are tired, and when we are tired we are pessimists. We fear the unimaginable at every turn. You know, I repeat, that she is well. Let that content you for the little while that now remains. Soon, very soon, you will have the happiness of seeing not her pothooks but herself. You will hear your praises from her lips. God, child, I envy you the joy to come. Dwell on that. The rest is naught."

André-Louis straightened himself. He tried to smile. But the effort did not quite succeed. "Thanks, Jean. You are a good fellow. But there's an evil premonition upon me. It's born perhaps of the sickness that comes of hope deferred."

"Premonition? Bah! Leave premonitions to old wives, and let's to supper. I've a couple of bottles of a Gascony wine that's as big a braggart as I am. It will paint the future a bright rose for you."

But proof was fast approaching that this evil premonition was anything but idle, that this dejection in the hour of triumph was justified by facts. The bearer of it was the Marquis de La Guiche, who had reached Paris that same evening.

CHAPTER XLII

PRINCELY GRATITUDE

DE LA GUICHE arrived at the Rue-de-Ménars at nine o'clock on the following morning, whilst de Batz and André-Louis, having broken their fast, still sat at table discussing the immediate measures to be taken. A message had been dispatched to Camille Desmoulins begging him to come at once, so that André-Louis might acquaint him with the famous note which he had prepared, and determine with him and perhaps with Danton as well, what form of publication it should be given; whether it should appear as an article in the *Vieux Cordelier*, or form the basis of a denunciation to be launched from the tribune of the Convention.

The unexpected arrival of La Guiche took them by surprise, and created a momentary diversion of their thoughts from this all-engrossing topic. De Batz sprang forward to embrace this oldest of his associates, who latterly and for so long had been absent from his side, serving the cause of the monarchy in other regions.

"La Guiche! Wherever you spring from, you could not be more opportune. You come in the very nick of time to lend a hand in the triumph of our long endeavours. What good angel sent you?"

The warmth of the welcome momentarily broke La Guiche's solemnity. A thin smile crossed the white hawk-face, but was gone almost as soon as it appeared.

"I see that you haven't heard," he said.

The gravity of his countenance, the dejection in his eyes, gave pause to both of them.

"Heard what?" asked de Batz.

"Pomelles was arrested late last night by order of the Committee of Public Safety. His papers have been seized. If I had arrived in Paris an hour earlier I might have been taken with him, for my first visit was to Bourgeois-Egalité to report events abroad. I am from Brussels."

He loosened and removed his cloak and bestowed it on a chair together with his conical hat which was adorned by a tricolour cockade. He stood forth, tall, slim, and elegant in a wine-coloured frock, buckskins and boots, his lustrous bronze hair tied in a ribbon of black silk.

De Batz stood before him momentarily dismayed and shaken. He was thinking quickly, anxiously watched by both his companions. Then, characteristically, he shrugged.

"Bad luck for Pomelles. It's the fortune of war. Who embarks on these enterprises must be prepared to leave his head in them. I always have been, God knows. But I've moved more carefully than old Pomelles. I often warned him that he did not take enough precautions. His continued immunity was increasing his carelessness, and now . . ." He shrugged again and spread his hands. "Poor devil!"

"The fact is," said La Guiche grimly, "nothing prospers with us. Toulon has fallen."

"That is stale news. We have known it for over three weeks, and we've grown reconciled. If Toulon has fallen, the royalist rising in the Vendée has gathered impetus. The loss in one place has been more than counterbalanced in the other."

But La Guiche was not disposed to optimism. "If I am a judge at all, the stand in the Vendée will end like that of Toulon and every other stand that has been made for the House of Bourbon."

"There's no reason for that fear," cut in André-Louis. "And anyway there's a stand to be made here in Paris that can hardly fail." Briefly he sketched the situation for La Guiche.

The newcomer's countenance brightened a little as he listened. "Faith! That's the first really good news I've heard in weeks. The first ray of light in all this gloom."

He pulled up a chair and sat down by the fire, spreading one of his fine hands to the blaze. The January morning was sharp. There had been a frost in the night, and the sun had not yet dispelled the chill mists that hung upon the city.

"There is nothing among Pomelles' papers, I suppose, that would incriminate you?"

De Batz shook his head. "Nothing. Pomelles was d'Entraques' man. I work independently. I should never have kept my head so long had it been otherwise."

"Can you do nothing for this poor devil, Jean? He is an old friend of mine, and he's done stout service. I would gladly take a risk for him."

"Perhaps. It is possible that I could buy him off. I've bought off so many. But nearly all the Conventionals who worked with me are awaiting the guillotine at this moment. Still there's Lavicomterie, and there's L'Huillier, who is on the Committee of Public Safety. I'll see them at the Tuileries to-day, and try to enlist their help."

He sat down. André-Louis followed his example, speaking as he drew out a chair from the table. "It's bad luck. A few

more days and there would have been no more question of arresting him. Yes. It's bad luck."

"Bad luck, as you say," the Marquis agreed from where he sat facing the other two. "But we have the luck that we deserve. Which is to say, not luck at all, but the natural effect of the causes that we provide." He spoke with a singular bitterness that provoked from de Batz a sharp denial.

"Ah, that no. I'll not suffer you to say it. Fate has fooled us rather mischievously at moments. But our endeavours have deserved well."

"Oh, I am not speaking of you and your loyal band here in Paris. I am thinking of that fat fool in Hamm."

"My God, La Guiche! You are speaking of the Regent."

"Who may one day be King. I am well aware of it."

De Batz frowned, between annoyance and perplexity. "You haven't turned sansculotte by any chance?"

"I've been tempted to do so ever since the fall of Toulon."

André-Louis shared the Baron's impatience.

"Toulon! Toulon! You have it on the brain. Do you deny that we were ill served by fortune there?"

"I do. We were ill served by the Comte de Provence. I place the responsibility for that defeat upon him."

"Upon him? Oh, this is madness!"

La Guiche curled his lip. "Madness, is it? Do you know the facts? Do you know that for months the defenders of Toulon clamoured for the presence of the Prince. They desired him at their head. Message after message was sent to him by Maudet, urging him, beseeching him to come; representing to him how his presence would stimulate those who had raised the royal standard for him."

"But he went in the end," said André-Louis.

"He set out to go. When it was too late. Even then I believe that he set out only because I shamed him into it. He started for Toulon at the very moment when weary of resistance, the royalists were about to own defeat. Discouraged by the indifference to their heroism and sufferings shown by the continual absence of the head of the house on whose behalf they sacrificed themselves, their will to conquer had gradually left them."

Still de Batz loyally defended his Prince. "It may not have been possible for him to leave Hamm before. How can you judge?"

"Because it happens that I know. A woman kept the Regent in Hamm. The pursuit of a banal amour was of more consequence

to that sluggish imbecile than his duty or all the blood that was being shed for him."

"Are you mad, La Guiche!"

La Guiche smiled weary contempt. "Not now. I was almost mad when I made the discovery. But I have since come to realize that the cause is greater than the man; that the cause is all; the man nothing. Because of this I have but one regret. That I did not pistol him when I found out what kept him from his sacred duty. It was neither more nor less than dishonouring rumour proclaimed it. Whilst that loyal band was bleeding to death for him in Toulon, he was retained in Hamm by nothing more than the soft embraces of Mademoiselle de Kercadiou. With her he consoled himself for the faithlessness of Madame de Balbi, of whom it is reported in Brussels that she has taken a Russian lover."

With a last angry shrug the Marquis slewed round in his chair to face the fire, and again held out his hands to the blaze.

In the room behind him the silence was unnatural. The other two seemed scarcely to draw breath. For some moments the only sound was the soft ticking of the Sèvres clock on the overmantel, marking the hour of half-past nine. De Batz felt as if a hand had suddenly clutched his heart. He sat rigidly, staring straight before him, afraid to turn his head lest he should see the face of André-Louis, who sat just out of arm's length on his right.

As for André-Louis, he had jerked himself bolt upright at the mention of Aline's name. He sat now, as if carved of wood or marble, his face, indeed, of a marble pallor.

Thus for half a dozen heart-beats. Then the Marquis, growing conscious of that uncanny stillness, turned, and puzzled, looked from one to the other of them.

"What the devil ails you?"

The question dissolved the bonds that had pinioned André-Louis. He rose, and stood very straight and stiff. He spoke slowly, his tone cold and incisive.

"An evil tongue is the flag of a cruel heart. I have listened to you in growing disbelief, Monsieur le Marquis. The last foul lie you uttered proves the worthlessness of all the rest."

And now both La Guiche and de Batz were on their feet as well, the Baron nervous for once in his life. La Guiche curbed his quick temper by an effort.

"Moreau, you must be out of your senses. These are not terms that I will suffer any man to employ towards me."

"I am aware of it. You have a remedy."

De Batz thrust himself forward, so that he could stop the rush of either of them.

"What's this? What's this? Mordiou! This is no time for private quarrels amongst ourselves. We have a cause to serve. . . ."

André-Louis interrupted him. "I have other things to serve as well, Jean. There is something that I set even above the cause. The honour of Mademoiselle de Kercadiou, which this liar has besmirched."

La Guiche took a step forward.

"Ah that, Parbleu! There may be a revolution in France. But not all the revolutions in the world——"

"Quiet, in the name of God!" The Baron's grip was upon the arm of the Marquis. "Listen a moment, both of you. Listen, I say! La Guiche, you do not understand. You do not know what you have said."

"Not know what I have said?" La Guiche looked down his nose at him. "A thousand devils, Jean! Am I an evil tongue as he has called me? Am I a man lightly to slur a woman's honour?"

"It is what you have proved yourself," barked André-Louis, the eyes blazing in his bloodless face.

And de Batz anxiously, to cover that fresh provocation, ran on: "You have listened to tales, to gossip, to scandal which is ever about the name of a prince, which——"

"Listened to scandal, you fool? Should I monger scandal? I speak to what I know. This tale, this scandal was current in Toulon when I was there. Because of it, because of the harm it was doing Monsieur's cause, Maudet dispatched me to Hamm, to inform Monsieur, so that he might come at once before it was too late to save even his honour. There I taxed d'Entragues with it, and d'Entragues could not deny it. But that is not all. I demanded to be taken instantly before the Regent. In my indignation I would not be denied. I was taken, and I surprised him in the arms of his woman. I saw him, I tell you, with these eyes. Do I make myself plain? I found him in the arms of Mademoiselle de Kercadiou, in Mademoiselle's room at the Bear Inn, whither I was conducted."

De Batz loosed his arm, and fell back uttering a groan of despair. He looked at André-Louis, and pity smote him at the sight of the young man's face.

"You say that you saw . . . that you saw . . ." André-Louis could not utter the words. The voice that had been so

cold and hard broke suddenly. "Oh, my God! My God! Is this true, La Guiche? Is this true?"

The sudden change from anger to grief, from menace to pleading, bewildered the Marquis. He put aside his own indignation to answer solemnly.

"As God's my witness, it is true. Should I swear away a woman's honour?"

André-Louis continued to stare at him for a moment. Then he covered his white face with trembling hands, his knees were loosened, and he sank down upon his chair again. Recollection had supplied something to confirm this dreadful story. His thoughts flashed back to Coblenz. Again Madame de Balbi stood before him in that room of the Three Crowns, warning him against Monsieur's interest in Aline, and against Madame's intention of taking Aline with her to Turin. He remembered words almost heated that had passed between Aline and himself when she had censured him for endangering the esteem which his highness showed her. And he, poor fool, had never drawn the obvious inference from that heat. He remembered that scene in the Prince's room at Hamm when Monsieur had slighted his brother so as to remove all obstacles to André-Louis' departure for Paris with de Batz. He reviewed it all in the revealing light of La Guiche's terrible disclosure, and perceived that here was the reason why in all these months Aline had never written, why she had ignored his last and so insistent prayer to send him just two lines in her own hand. And there was more.

He sat there, a man in agony, his elbows on his knees, his face in his hands.

"That slug!" he sobbed. "That obscene, gross slug acrawl upon my pure white lily!"

La Guiche recoiled, a sudden horror on his face. His questioning glance asked unnecessary confirmation of de Batz, and de Batz unnecessarily confirmed.

"They were betrothed, La Guiche."

La Guiche was flung into an agony of remorse. "André! My poor André! I did not know, André. Forgive me. I did not know. I did not dream. . . ."

In silence André-Louis made a gesture as of dismissal. But the Marquis remained rooted there, his hawk face twisted into lines of pain and anger.

"What a Prince to serve! What a Prince to die for! What a consistence in his conduct! He could not come to join those who were fighting his battles in Toulon, because he could not leave the pursuit of the woman who belonged to the man who

was fighting his battles here in Paris. There's princely gratitude! Had I known all when in Hamm I should certainly have pistolled him."

He tossed his arms to the ceiling as if in a protest to the heavens beyond it, then swung to the fire, and stood with hunched shoulders, staring gloomily into the heart of it.

De Batz crossed the room to set a hand affectionately, silently, upon André's bowed shoulders. But he had no words. His heart was sick within him. Not only was his grief deep and sincere, but he was profoundly annoyed that the news should have come to numb André-Louis' faculties at a time when he would need them all for the final task that now lay before them.

"André!" he said at last, very gently. "Courage, André!"

André roused himself. "Go," he said quietly. "Go, both of you."

De Batz looked at him, then looked across at La Guiche, who had turned his head. He signed to him, and together they quietly went out, leaving André-Louis alone with his sorrow.

CHAPTER XLIII

ON THE BRIDGE

DE BATZ spent the morning at the Tuileries with the Citizen Sevignon, as La Guiche was known to those with whom he had any acquaintance there. They employed the time in doing what was possible to influence the release of the Chevalier de Pomelles. But their efforts promised little success. Lavicomterie, upon whom de Batz was chiefly depending, pronounced the case a dangerous one in which to meddle. The evidence before the Committee of Public Safety was, he understood, of an overwhelming nature, and it had been examined by Saint-Just, whose bloodthirst would hardly suffer the unfortunate agent's escape. Still, cautiously, Lavicomterie would see what could be done.

Sénard, the secretary of the committee, that other valuable secret associate of the Baron's, also promised to do anything that

might be safely possible. But in his view, as in Lavicomterie's, Saint-Just was the insurmountable obstacle.

"Well, well!" said de Batz. "At least delay Pomelles' trial. We shall see what the next few days will bring forth."

To La Guiche, as they stepped down into the chill damp of the gardens, he was more explicit. "If we can gain a few days all should be well, for in a few days the obstacle will have been removed."

Nevertheless, it was in no state of elation that the two came back to the Rue-de-Ménars for the mid-day meal. They found André-Louis seated before the fire, which was now burning low, his foot upon the brass fender, his elbow on his knee, his chin in his hand. He turned his head, and showed them a face that was grey and drawn with pain, the face of a man who had suddenly aged. Having seen who came he resumed his contemplation of the fire.

De Batz went to set a hand upon his shoulder. "Come, André. Leave brooding. I know it hurts. But you must take heart. There are things to do that will shift your thoughts from your own wrongs. That will help."

"There is nothing more for me to do. I have finished."

"That is what you feel now. The blow is heavy. But your youth will lend you the strength to bear it. Turn your mind to other things. Oh, I know my world, André. I am a deal older than you, and I have not lived quite in vain, or without coming into some knowledge of the human heart. Distraction is what you need, and there is no distraction like work."

André-Louis stared up at him and laughed. It was an expression of pain. "Work? What work?"

"Why, the work that lies before us. I have sent for Desmoulins, he should have been here by now. When he comes——"

André-Louis interrupted him.

"I have finished, I tell you. Finished with kingmaking."

"Faith," said La Guiche, "I should feel the same in his case."

De Batz moved slowly away, his chin on his breast. At the window he turned. He sighed.

"If this infernal news had reached us before his work was done at Blérancourt . . ." He spread his hands, his face expressive.

"It would have been disastrous to the cause of his highness the Regent, would it not?" said André-Louis.

"Naturally," said the Marquis. "And I should not have blamed you."

André-Louis took his foot from the fender, and slewed round in his chair.

"I am glad to hear you say that, La Guiche."

"Glad?" quoth de Batz, who did not like either the young man's tone, or his expression. "Do you mean something, André?"

"If I ever meant anything." He paused, then added: "Desmoulins has been here in your absence, Jean, and he has gone again."

"You gave him the documents. Good. No time need be lost. What did he say? Wasn't he elated?"

"I did not mention the matter."

"But then . . ." de Batz checked, frowning. "You didn't give him the documents? But don't you realize the danger of keeping them? At any moment Saint-Just may hear from Blérancourt."

André-Louis laughed again, that odd, hard, mirthless laugh. "On that score at least you need have no anxiety. He will find nothing. There are the documents, Jean." And he pointed to a heap of black ashes that lay on the narrow hearth, half-concealed by the fender.

The Baron came forward, staring as if the eyes would drop from his head. He fetched out a rough oath in a voice suddenly hoarse. "Do you mean that you have burnt them? That you have burnt the proofs? The fruit of all that labour?"

"It surprises you?" André-Louis rose, thrusting back his chair.

"Not me!" said La Guiche.

De Batz swung upon the Marquis, his face purple.

"But—my God!—do you realize what he has burnt? He has burnt the evidence that would have sent Saint-Just to the guillotine and brought down the Robespierrists in execration. He has burnt the cause. That is what he has burnt. He has destroyed the labour of months; rendered fruitless everything that we have done." He checked, and turned again, raging, to André-Louis. "Oh, it is impossible! You haven't done this. You couldn't have done it. You dared not do it. You are fooling me. You thought of it perhaps, and you are making me realize the vengeance that you might have taken."

Coldly André-Louis answered him. "I am telling you what I have done."

De Batz was trembling from head to foot in his anger. He raised his clenched fist, and held it poised a moment, as if about to strike André-Louis. Then he let it fall heavily to his side again.

"You scoundrel! Those papers were not yours to destroy. They belonged to the cause."

"My betrothed was not his to destroy. She belonged to me."

"God of Heaven! You'll drive me mad. Your betrothed! Your betrothed and the Regent! What is either of them when the fate of a nation is at issue? Is only the Regent concerned in this!"

"The Regent or his family," said André-Louis. "It is all one to me."

"All one to you, you fool! Is it all one to you that a cause, the monarchy itself, was at stake?"

"The monarchy means the House of Bourbon. I have not served the House of Bourbon one half so vilely as the House of Bourbon has served me. The harm that I have done to the House of Bourbon may be repaired. The harm that a member of it, the very one for whom I laboured and risked my life, has done to me can never be repaired. Could I continue in his service after this?"

"To leave his service was your right," said La Guiche quietly, sadly, "but not to destroy that which was not strictly yours."

"Not strictly mine? Did I not discover and collect those documents? Did I not hourly risk detection and imperil my neck in doing it, so that I might make kings for France out of such base scoundrels as this Comte de Provence? And you say they are not strictly mine? Mine or not, they are destroyed. It is finished."

Stricken by anger and despair, de Batz could only inveigh.

"And so in a fit of spite, you villain, you wreck all our hopes in the very moment of success. You render vain all that has been done, wasted all the lives that have been sacrificed: Chabot, Delaunay, Julien and the rest. The Freys, and even little Léopoldine. The little Léopoldine about whom you were so tender. All just waste. Oh, my God! Everything sacrificed on the altar of your damned resentment. All because——"

"Oh, have done!" rasped André-Louis. "I've heard enough. When you are calmer, perhaps you will understand."

"What will I understand? Your villainy?"

"The agony that inspired me." He passed a hand wearily across his brow. "Jean," he said hoarsely, "if any consideration could have restrained me, it must have been the thought of what this would mean to you. But it did not occur to me at the time. We have been good comrades, Jean. I am sorry it should end thus."

"You may take your regrets to Hell," said de Batz. "And

that is where I wish you." He paused merely so as to brace himself to continue: "This is what comes of putting faith in a man who is without loyalties to any but himself, a man who is now a royalist, now a revolutionary, now a royalist again, as suits his own personal ends; just consistent only in that all the time he is Scaramouche. As God's my witness, I marvel that I don't kill you for what you have done." With infinite contempt he repeated: "Scaramouche!" And on the word, he struck André-Louis hard across the face with his open hand.

Instantly La Guiche was at his side, seizing his arm, restraining him, interposing himself between them.

André-Louis, his breathing quickened, the impression of the Baron's fingers showing faintly red upon the livid pallor of his face, smiled faintly.

"It is no matter, La Guiche. No doubt he is as right by his own lights as I am by mine."

But this only served to feed the Gascon's furious temper.

"You'll turn the other cheek, will you? You mealy-mouthed moralist! You cheap-jack philosopher. Get you back to your theatre, you clown. Go!"

"I go, de Batz. I could have wished that we had parted otherwise. But it's no matter. I'll keep the blow, in memory of you." He stepped past him, to the door. "Good-bye, La Guiche."

"A moment, Moreau," the Marquis cried. "Where are you going?"

But André-Louis did not answer him, the truth being that he did not know. He stumbled out, and closed the door. From a peg in the passage he took down his cloak and hat and sword, and with these passed out, and descended the stairs.

In the courtyard below he was arrested. As he issued from the house, a man in a heavy coat and a round hat was entering by the porte-cochère followed by two municipals. It hardly required that escort to announce the police spy. He stood in the path of André-Louis, scrutinizing him.

"You lodge here, citizen? What is your name?"

"André-Louis Moreau, agent of the Committee of Public Safety."

This man, however, was not intimidated by the description. "Your card?"

André-Louis produced it. The fellow looked at it, and nodded to his municipals. "You are my man. Order for your arrest." He waved a paper under André-Louis' nose.

"The charge?" inquired André-Louis, momentarily taken aback.

The man turned on his heel contemptuously. Over his shoulder, as he retreated, he spoke to his men. "Fetch him along."

André-Louis asked no further questions, offered no protest. He had no doubt of the explanation. News had come to Saint-Just from Blérancourt, and the representative had been quick to act. And the papers which by now should have been in the hands of Desmoulins, the papers with which he could have paralysed all action on the part of Saint-Just, and by the production of which he could have justified his unauthorized activities at Blérancourt, were just a heap of ashes over which de Batz was no doubt still raging above stairs.

If it was matter for anything, thought André-Louis, it was matter for laughter. And he laughed. His world had crumbled about him.

They marched him across the Tuileries' Gardens, along the quay, over the Pont Neuf to the Conciergerie. In the porters' lodge they searched him. They found upon him besides a watch and some assignats, to the value of perhaps a thousand livres, nothing of worth or consequence. These effects were restored to him, and he was marched away by dark, vaulted, stone-flagged passages below stairs to a solitary cell where they left him to meditate upon the imminent and abrupt ending of his odd career.

If he meditated upon it, he did so without dismay. There was such pain in his heart, such numbness in his mind that he could contemplate his end with complete indifference.

In a curious detachment he reviewed now the work he had done in Paris since that June morning which had seen the fall of the Girondins. It was not nice. It was all rather sordid. In his kingmaking he had pursued the tactics of the agent provocateur. It was ignoble. But at least it was appropriate in that it was done in the service of an ignoble prince. It would be best to end it all, to sleep, and to be free at last. Of Aline he sternly endeavoured not to think at all, since he could not bear the image which the thought of her brought to stand before his mental eyes.

Late that night as he sat in the dark the key grated in his door. It opened, and in the yellow light of a lantern, two men stood framed in the doorway. One took the lantern from the other, spoke some words, entered, and closed the door. He came forward, and set the lantern on the soiled deal table. He

was a slender, elegant young man with the face of an Antinous under a cluster of golden hair. His eyes were large, liquid and tender, but as they looked upon André-Louis who sat unmoved, the lines of the handsome face were stern. It was Saint-Just.

"So you are the rogue who went to play comedy at Blérancourt?" He spoke on a note of quiet derision.

Something of the old spirit of Scaramouche flared up from that dejected soul.

"I am rather a good comedian, don't you think, my dear Chevalier."

Saint-Just frowned, annoyed by the title. Then he faintly smiled as he shook his golden head. "Not good enough for comedy. I hope you'll play tragedy better. The stage is set for you on the Place de la Revolution. The play is The National Barber."

"And you are the author, I suppose. But there may be a part there for you, too, before very long, in a play called 'Poetic Justice' or 'The Biter Bit'."

Saint-Just continued to regard him steadily. "You are possibly under the delusion that you will be given an opportunity to talk when you come to trial? That you will be able to tell the world of certain things you ferreted out at Blérancourt?"

"Is it a delusion?"

"Entirely. For there will be no trial. I have given my instructions. There will be a mistake. A mistake for reasons of State. You will be included, entirely by accident, in the next batch sent to execution. The mistake—the so regrettable mistake—will be discovered afterwards."

He ceased speaking and waited.

André-Louis shrugged indifferently. "Who cares?"

"You think that I am bluffing you?"

"I see no other object in your coming here to tell me this."

"Ah! It does not occur to you that I might wish to give you a chance."

"I thought that would follow. After the bluff, the bargain."

"A bargain, yes, if you choose. But bluff there is none. You stole certain papers from Thuillier at Blérancourt."

"Yes, and others from Bontemps. Hadn't you heard?"

"Where are they now?"

"Do you mean to say you haven't found them? Yet you'll have searched my lodgings, I suppose."

"Don't play the fool, Moreau." The gentle voice acquired a rasp. "Of course I have had your lodgings searched; searched under my own supervision."

"And you haven't found the letters? But how vexatious for you! I wonder where they can have got to."

"So do I," snapped Saint-Just. "My curiosity is so lively that I'll give you your life and a safe-conduct in exchange for the information."

"In exchange for the information?"

"In exchange for the letters, that is to say."

André-Louis took his time, regarding him. Under his admirable self-control, an anxiety was to be guessed in Saint-Just. "Ah! That's different. I am afraid it's beyond my power to give you the letters."

"Your head will fall if you don't, and that to-morrow."

"Then my head must fall. For I can't give you the letters."

"What do you hope to gain by obstinacy? The letters will buy your life. Where are they?"

"Where you'll never find them."

There followed a considerable pause, during which Saint-Just continued steadily to regard him. The representative's breathing had quickened a little. In the yellow light of the lantern his colour seemed to have darkened.

"I am offering you your only chance of life, Moreau."

"How you repeat yourself," said André-Louis.

"You are resolved not to tell me?"

"I have told you. I have nothing to add."

"Very well," said Saint-Just quietly, yet with obvious reluctance. "Very well!" He picked up the lantern, and walked to the door. There he turned. He held up the lantern, so that its light fell full upon the prisoner's face. "For the last time: will you buy your life with them?"

"You're tiresome. Go to the devil."

Saint-Just pressed his lips together, lowered the lantern, and went out.

André-Louis sat alone in darkness once more. He told himself that no doubt he was rightly punished for what he had done. Then he relapsed into his weary indifference of what might follow.

Early next morning a gaoler brought him a lump of horrible black bread and a jug of water. He drank the water, but made no attempt to touch the repulsive bread. After that he sat on, in a dull numbed state of body and of mind, and waited.

Sooner than he had expected, less than an hour after serving him that breakfast, the gaoler appeared again. He held the door open, and beckoned him.

"You are to come with me, citizen."

André-Louis looked at his watch. It was half-past nine. Singularly early for the tumbrils to be setting out. Was he perhaps, to have a trial, after all? At the thought a tiny flame of hope was kindled, almost despite him, in his soul.

But it was extinguished when he found himself conducted to the hall where the toilet of the condemned was usually performed. Here, however, a great surprise awaited him. The vaulted place was tenanted by a single person: a short trim sturdy figure dressed in black. It was de Batz.

The Baron advanced to meet him. "I have an order for your release," he said, quietly grave. "Come along."

André-Louis wondered if he was still asleep in his cell and dreaming. His sensations were curiously unreal, and the gloom of the hall on that January morning served to add to their unreality. In this vague condition he stepped beside de Batz to the porter's lodge, where they were detained. The Baron presented a paper, and the concierge scratched an entry in a book, then grinned up at them from under his fur bonnet.

"You're lucky, my lad, to be leaving us so soon. And on foot. It's more usual to ride from here in style. A good-day to you!"

They were outside on the quay, under the grey sky, beside the yellow swollen river. They walked along in silence towards the Pont Neuf. Midway across this a quacksalver was setting up his booth. A little way beyond him, André-Louis slackened his pace. The Baron slackened with him.

"It is time we talked, Jean. There will be some explanation of this morning walk."

The Baron looked at him, and the sternness of his face relaxed.

"I owed you what I have done. That is all. For one thing, I struck you yesterday. Because you might desire satisfaction of me one day for the blow I could not meanly leave you to perish."

Despite himself André-Louis smiled at the Gasconnade.

"Was that your only reason for doing whatever you have done?"

"Of course not. I owed it you on other grounds. As an amend, if you choose." He leaned upon the parapet of the bridge, looking down at the water swirling against the piers. André-Louis leaned beside him. They were practically alone there. Briefly, gloomily, tonelessly, de Batz informed him of what had happened.

"Tissot witnessed your arrest yesterday in the courtyard. He brought us word of it at once, of course, and as we did not

know what might follow, but knew that we were not safe, ourselves, we made off at once, and went to earth at Roussel's in the Rue Helvétius. We were thankful to get away, and no more than in time. I left Tissot to observe. He reported to me last night that within a few minutes of our departure, Saint-Just himself, arrived with a couple of municipals. They ransacked my lodgings so thoroughly that they have left them in a state of wreckage.

"Your action in not giving the documents to Desmoulins so that with them we could now defy Saint-Just placed us all in a position of great danger. It became necessary to meet it. I went to Saint-Just two hours ago. He was still in bed. But he was glad to see me, and received me with threats of instant arrest, with the guillotine to follow, unless I chose to purchase my life and liberty by surrendering to him the letters which you had stolen from Thuillier and Bontemps.

"I laughed at him. 'Do you suppose, Saint-Just, that I should walk into your house without being aware that this is how you would receive me, and, therefore, without taking my precautions? You are not really clever, Saint-Just. You succeed in imposing yourself upon those who are even more foolish than yourself; that is all! When you threaten to take off my head, you really threaten to take off your own. For the one follows upon the other as inevitably as effect upon cause.'

"That gave him something to think about.

"'You have come to bargain with me?' he said.

"'A moment's reflection must have shown you that I could come for no other purpose, and you might have spared the breath you wasted in threats'

"He seemed relieved, poor fool. 'You have brought me the letters, then?'

"'Either you are ingenuous Saint-Just, or you think that I am. No, my friend, I have not brought you the letters, and I never shall. I have brought you a warning, that is all. A warning that if you raise a finger against me, and unless you do what else I require, those letters will instantly be in the hands of Danton.'

"That put him in a panic. 'You would never dare,' he roared.

"'But why not?' I asked him. 'It is you who will not dare to refuse me, now that you know that your head will pay the price of your refusal. For you can be under no delusion as to what use Danton will make of the letters. Their publication will show that the ci-devant Chevalier de Saint-Just (that is

how they will speak of you, how they are speaking of you already) the *ci-devant* Chevalier de Saint-Just is true to the evil aristocratic stock from which he springs. That he enriches himself at the expense of the nation, and that he abuses his power to issue letters of *cachet* so as to put away the inconvenient persons he has wronged. And that he covers it all under a mantle of virtue, of asceticism, hypocritically preaching purity in private as in public life. A nice tale, Saint-Just. A nice tale to be told by a man with the proofs in his hand.'

"He sprang at me like a tiger, his hands reaching for my throat. I laid him low by a kick in the stomach, and invited him to leave violence, come to his senses, and consider his position and mine.

"He gathered himself up, in a rage. He sat down, half-naked as he was, on his tumbled bed and talked foolishly at first, then more wisely. I should have all I wanted in return for the letters.

"But I shook my head at him. 'I do not trust you, Saint-Just. I know your record. You are a low, dishonest scoundrel, and only a fool would take your word. It is for you to take mine. And take it you must because you cannot help yourself. I'll keep faith with you as long as you keep faith with me. Do as I require of you, and I give you my word of honour that no man shall ever see those letters. You may consider them as good as destroyed, and you may sleep in peace. But I do not surrender them, because if I did so I should have no guarantee that you would not play me false. In other words, I retain them so as to keep you honest.'

"That, of course, was not the end of it. We talked for nearly half an hour. But at last he came to it, as it was clear that he must. What choice had he? Better take the risk of my keeping faith with him than face the certainty I had given him that the letters would go to Danton at once. He ended by surrendering. He would attempt nothing against me, and he would give me at once an order for your release and a safe-conduct for you, in case it should now be necessary, so as to enable you to depart the country."

There was silence. They continued to lean upon the parapet.

André-Louis fetched a ponderous sigh. "You have been generous, Jean. I did not deserve this at your hands."

"I am aware of it." De Batz was stern. "But I struck you yesterday, and I say again it is in my code that I must preserve the life of any man who has grounds for demanding satisfaction of me."

André-Louis turned sideways against the stone parapet, so

as to face the Gascon "But you also said that you have another reason?"

"It is true. I have preserved you also because I require of you in return a last service to the cause."

"Ah that, no! Name of God, I will not raise a finger——"

'Wait child! Hear first what the service is. It is one that you may actually desire to discharge. If you don't I'll not insist. I invite you to seek out the Comte de Provence. He should be at Turin by now under the hospitality of his father-in-law, the King of Sardinia. Tell him of what has happened here and of how we had brought matters to the very threshold of success for him. Then tell him how the chance was destroyed and why.'

It took André-Louis aback. "To what purpose this?"

"The story has a moral. It may serve as a warning to him. Considering it, he may come into some acquaintance with honour. Let him know that his wanton neglect of it on this occasion has cost him more than the loss of Toulon. Thus he may render himself more worthy of the position he holds at the head of the monarchical cause in France, and he may see to it in future that he holds that position by virtue of something more than his birth. You may say that I sent you. Tell him that if I remain it is because I trust that this bitter lesson will not be wasted." He paused, and the keen dark eyes flashed as he turned them upon his companion. "Will you go?"

A smile of infinite bitterness broke across the haggard face of André-Louis.

"I will go, Jean."

CHAPTER XLIV

ACCOUNT RENDERED

It may interest those who are concerned to analyse the sequel of events, the multiplication of circumstance, amoeba-like by fission, to speculate upon what might have been the end of this story of André Louis Moreau, but for that mission upon which the

Baron de Batz dispatched him as a last service to the cause. Among his surviving papers there is no hint of what alternative he might have found.

Neither are there any details of the journey to Turin upon which he obediently set out. Remembering that the long line of French frontier from Belgium to the Mediterranean was an armed camp and that he would have to pass through it, the difficulties he encountered must have been considerable. We are also left to infer this from the fact that it was not until the early days of the following April that he rode into the capital of the Kingdom of Sardinia. He arrived there at just about the time that the triumphant Robespierrists, whose fate for a moment had lain in the hollow of his hand, were assuming the undisputed mastery of France. Danton's great head had rolled into the executioner's basket, and Robespierre, ably supported by his terrible acolytes, Saint-Just and Couthon, was establishing with these two an evil triumvirate whose power was absolute. The restoration of the monarchy had never seemed so distant.

Turin, which André-Louis had deemed his goal, was to prove but a halting-place upon the way. He learned there that the Comte de Provence, unable to find an abiding refuge at the court of his timid father-in-law, had, after many humiliating appeals, been accorded in Verona the hospitality of the Republic of Venice. This as a result of representations made on his behalf by Russia and Spain, who undertook presently to provide for him more permanently.

His highness had been received by the Most Serene Republic subject to certain rigorous conditions. He was to do nothing that should compromise the Republic's strict neutrality. The title of Regent which he had assumed would not there be recognized, nor must he look for any of the courtesies normally commanded by a person of royal blood.

To comply he had assumed the title of Comte de Lisle, and he was quietly installed in the summer residence of the patrician family of Gazzola, near the Capuchin Convent in the suburbs of Verona. It was a simple, unpretentious villa, clad in jessamine and clematis.

His little court was much the same as it had been at Hamm. It was composed by the Counts d'Avaray and d'Entraques, two secretaries, one of whom was the Comte de Plougastel; a surgeon, Monsieur Colon; and four servants. The remainder of those who followed him or sought him in his exile were lodged in the inns of the town. For the rest, his existence was as impecunious as it had been in Westphalia, and he was constrained to continue

the practice of a frugality unwelcome to one who loved good cheer as much as he did.

To seek him in these surroundings André-Louis rode out from Turin again, and took the road through Piedmont and across the fertile plain of Lombardy where spring had spread already her luxuriant carpets. It was on an April day that he rode at last, dusty and travel-worn into the lovely, ancient, brick-and-marble city of the Scaligers, and drew rein in the courtyard of the Due Torri in the Piazza dei Signori.

Here, scarcely had he set foot to the ground, whilst an ostler led away his horse, and the landlord stood to receive his commands, a lady dressed for walking, in a long claret cloak and a wide black hat, who issued from the inn, was brought to a staggering halt on the very threshold by the sight of him.

André-Louis found himself looking into the face of Madame de Plougastel, a white face in which the lips were parted the eyes wide and the eyebrows raised, its whole expression blending astonishment and fear.

To him, too, there was, of course, surprise in the meeting. But it was slight and transient. Her presence here was very natural, and she was of those he must have sought before again departing.

He bared his head, and bowed low with a murmured : "Madame !"

Thereupon, after another instant's gaping pause, she brushed past the landlord and came to clutch the traveller by his two shoulders.

"André-Louis !" she cried, her note almost interrogative "André-Louis ! It is you. It is you."

There was a queer tenderness in her voice that moved him. He feared that she was about to weep. He schooled himself to reply in quiet, level tones.

"It is I, Madame. I take you by surprise, no doubt."

"No doubt ? You take me by surprise. By surprise ?" And now it seemed as if she wanted to laugh, or as if she balanced between laughter and tears. "Whence are you ? Whence do you spring ?" she asked him.

"Why, from France, of course."

"Of course ? You say of course ? You spring from the grave, and you say I come from France, of course."

But as now it was his turn to stare, she took him by the arm.

"Come you in," she said, and almost dragged him with her across the threshold, leaving the landlord to shrug his shoulders

and to inform the waiting ostler in confidence that they were all mad these French.

André-Louis was conducted along a gloomy, unevenly-paved passage, and ushered into an austere but fairly spacious sitting-room on the left of it. A rug was spread on the stone floor. The ceiling was rudely frescoed in a pattern of fruit and flowers. The sparse furniture was of dark walnut, roughly carved. The tall mullioned windows, about which green creepers rioted looked out upon a garden splashed with sunshine.

He stood bemused in mid-apartment whilst for a moment again she surveyed him. Then, still bemused, she had taken him in her arms. She was kissing him fondly and fondly murmuring his name before he took alarm at her transports.

"Madame! Madame! In Heaven's name collect yourself, madame."

"Can I help it, André-Louis? Can I help it? I have believed you dead, and mourned you these months and now and now . . ." She was weeping.

"You have believed me dead?" He stood suddenly stiff within the compass of those maternal arms. His quick mind, that ever moved by leaps was racing over all that was implied in that assertion.

And then the door behind them opened. A harsh voice spoke.

"I have been waiting, madame, for . . ." The voice checked, and then exclaimed: "Name of God! What is this?"

They fell apart. André-Louis turned. On the threshold, the door wide behind him, stood Monsieur de Plougastel, his brows knit, his face darkening.

André-Louis stood confused, fearful for his mother. But she, helped perhaps by her excitement by the singleness of her thought, displayed no awkwardness.

"But look who it is, Plougastel."

The Count craned his neck to stare. "Moreau!" he said. He too was faintly surprised. But in the main indifferent. This godson of Kercadiou's was nothing to him, and he had always thought his wife ridiculous in her attachment to this good-for-nothing, simply because she had known him as a child. "We thought you dead," he added, and closed the door.

"But he's alive! Alive!" exclaimed Madame in a quivering voice.

"So I perceive." Monsieur de Plougastel was dry. "God knows if he's to be envied."

André-Louis now white and grim, desired to know how such a

thing had been assumed, and heard, of course, that Langéac had borne the tale to Hamm of his having been killed in the attempt to rescue the Queen

"But Langéac was followed by another messenger who carried the true story and also a letter from me to Aline. I know that he arrived safely."

"The letter never did," Madame asserted.

"But that is impossible, madame. I know that the letter arrived. And it was not by any means the last. I sent several others, and some of the messengers I have since seen, and I have heard from them that those letters were delivered. What does it mean? Can Aline have wished to——"

Madame interrupted him. "Aline mourned you for dead. Aline never had any news of you directly or indirectly after the tale that Langéac brought of your death. Of that you can be sure. I can answer for what Aline believed as I can answer for what I believed, myself."

"But then? My letters?" he cried almost in exasperation.

"It is impossible that she should have received them. Impossible that she would not have told me. She knew my own . . ." she checked, remembering Plougastel's presence, choked down the word "anguish" and replaced it by "concern". Then she continued: "But apart from that, I know André, I know that she remained in the conviction that you were dead."

He stood there clenching and unclenching his hands, his chin on his breast. There was something here he could not fathom. Links were missing from the chain he sought to complete.

Abruptly he asked of her and of the Comte de Plougastel, who remained coldly aloof, the question beating in his mind. "How was it possible that these letters were not delivered to her?" And swift on the heels of this came his next fierce question, addressed directly to the Count. "By whose contriving was it? Do you know, Monsieur de Plougastel?"

Plougastel raised his brows. "What do you mean? Do I know?"

"You were in attendance upon Monsieur. It may be within your knowledge. That these letters reached Hamm leaves no doubt. Langéac assured me of it so far as the one he carried for me was concerned. He told me that he left it with Monsieur d'Entraques, to be delivered. Monsieur d'Entraques?" Again it was Plougastel he questioned. "Ay, it lies between Monsieur d'Entraques and the Regent."

It was Madame de Plougastel who answered him

"If those letters reached the hands of Monsieur d'Entragues, they must have been suppressed André."

"It is the conclusion I had formed, madame," said André-Louis, whilst the Count stormed at his lady for an assertion which he described as monstrous.

"It is not the assertion that is monstrous, but the fact," she retorted. "For clearly it must be the fact."

Monsieur de Plougastel empurpled. "Madame, in all my life I have never known you practise discretion in your assumptions. But this transcends all bounds."

What further form his voluble protest took André-Louis did not wait to ascertain. He heard his storming voice, but did not heed his words. Abruptly he quitted the room, and went forth to demand his horse and directions touching the whereabouts of the Casa Gazzola.

He came to that modest villa in the outskirts, tethered his horse within the gateway and strode purposefully to the door within the creeper-clad porch. It stood open to the little hallway. He rapped with the butt of his riding-whip on the panel, and to the servant who came in answer to the summons announced himself a courier from Paris.

This made a stir. Only a moment was he kept waiting in the hall until d'Entragues, scrupulously dressed as ever, graceful and consequential as if they were at Versailles, came hurrying forth. At sight of André-Louis the Count checked, and the expression of the dark, handsome face with its deeply graven rather sinister lines underwent a perceptible change.

"Moreau!" he exclaimed.

André-Louis bowed. He was very coldly self-possessed now, his face set and grim. "Your memory flatters me, Monsieur le Comte. You believed me dead, I think?"

D'Entragues missed the mockery in his tone. He stammered in the precipitance of his affirmative reply, in his expressions of satisfaction at this evidence that the rumours had been unfounded. Then dismissing all that in haste, he ended on the question: "Are you from Paris, do you say?"

"With extraordinary news."

To d'Entragues' excited demand for details André-Louis swore that he had not breath to tell his tale twice, and desired to be taken at once to the Regent.

He was ushered into the presence chamber, which, if of no better proportions, was at least more dignified than that of Hamm. The floor was marbled and the ceiling trivially frescoed with cupids and garlands the work of some journeyman artist's hand.

There was a carved press, a gilded coffer, some tall chairs in dark leather with faded gildings were ranged against the wall, and in the middle of the well-lighted room a table with corkscrew legs at which his highness sat at work. He appeared to have increased in bulk and weight, but his face had lost some of its high colour. He was neatly dressed, and his head was powdered. He wore the ribbon of the Holy Ghost and a small dress sword. At the table's farther end sat the Comte d'Avary pallid, fair and frail.

"Monsieur Moreau, with news from Paris monseigneur," d'Entraques announced.

His highness laid down his pen, and looked up. Liquid eyes that seemed full of pathos pondered the newcomer, noted the dust upon him and the erect carriage of his slender vigorous figure.

"Moreau?" he echoed. "Moreau?" The name was awakening memories in the royal mind. They came with a rush and at their coming the colour rose in the great face and then receded again. The voice strove to maintain its level tone. "Ah, Moreau! And from Paris, with news, you say?"

"With great news, monseigneur," André-Louis replied. "I am sent by the Baron de Batz to give your highness the full details of the underground campaign we have been conducting against the revolutionaries, and of the stages by which we possessed ourselves of the keys to ultimate success."

"Success?" the Regent echoed. He leaned forward eagerly. "Success, sir?"

"Your highness shall judge."

André-Louis was very cold and formal in his manner. He began with the fall of the Girondins, stressing the part which de Batz and he had played in this by their propaganda.

"They were the most dangerous of all the foes of monarchy," he explained, "because they were sane and moderate in their notions. If they had prevailed they would have set up an orderly republican government under which the people might have been content. Therefore their removal was a great forward step. It left the government entirely in the hands of incompetent men. Disruption and famine followed. Discontent arose and a disposition to violence which only required clear direction so as to be turned into the proper channels."

"This is what we set out to do; to expose for the venal scoundrels that they were the men whom the people trusted; and to show the connection between this rascality and the sufferings and privations which in the name of Liberty the people were undergoing."

Briefly he sketched the India Company scandal in which they had implicated Chabot, Bazire and the other prominent men of the Mountain party, momentarily bringing that party into disrepute and suspicion. He showed how again their active propaganda had intensified the feeling

"It was a bad moment for the Robespierrists. They knew themselves sorely shaken in the public esteem. But they rallied. Saint-Just, the ablest of them all, the champion and guiding spirit of Robespierre, boldly grasped the nettle and preached a crusade of purification against all those who trafficked in their mandate, to which trafficking he assigned the public distress.

"For a moment confidence was restored. But it left the Robespierrists shaken, and another such blow at the right moment must lay them low "

He went on to mention the return of Danton and to dwell upon Danton's moderate and rather reactionary spirit, aroused by the excesses of the Hébertistes and Robespierrists. He showed how confidently de Batz counted upon Danton to bring back the monarchy once the others were out of the way, and he went on to the measures taken for their elimination. Danton had begun by attacking Hébert and his gang, and he had destroyed them aided at the last moment by Robespierre.

And then, at last, he came to the steps which he personally had taken so as to expose the venality, hypocrisy and secret tyranny of that popular idol Saint-Just, clearly convincing the Regent that the revolution would never survive Saint-Just's fall.

"I come back to Paris " he said, 'with the completest proofs of Saint-Just's villainy and corruption " He detailed them, and went on : "Desmoulins is to expose him in the *Vieux Cordelier* as a beginning. Then another—and that other will be Danton himself—will follow up the publication by an attack in the Convention ; an attack which is not to be met ; an attack under which Saint-Just must inevitably go down dragging Robespierre with him and leaving the party discredited, despised, detested. Danton will remain at the head of a state faced by a people weary of revolution and finally disillusioned on the subject of revolutionists, finally persuaded that their faith has been abused."

He paused. They were silent, intent, moved by an excitement which had been visibly growing in a measure as the clear narrative proceeded. As he paused there was a movement almost of impatience from d'Avary, whose pale eyes were fixed upon him. The Regent, no less intent mumbled :

"Well, sir ? Well ?"

D'Entragues' keener wits had been a little puzzled by the tense André-Louis was employing. "Do you mean," he asked, "that this is the situation which is now established?"

"This is the situation we had established just before I left Paris. It was something to compensate for the fall of Toulon and the royalist defeat in the South; something worth a dozen royalist victories in the field, for it opens the door for the unopposed return of the monarchical party. Your highness perceives this?"

The Regent was trembling in his excitement.

"Of course I perceive it. It is astounding. I can scarcely believe in so much good fortune at last, after all that we have suffered."

"I am glad that you perceive the inevitability of the success to follow, monseigneur."

"By now it must have followed," cut in d'Avaray. "If this was the state of affairs you left in Paris. The rest must already have happened."

André-Louis stood looking at them with brooding eyes. The normal pallor of his face had deepened in the last moment or two; the ghost of an oddly-mocking smile had crept round the corners of his lips.

"Come, sir," cried the Regent breathlessly. "Have you any doubt of what Monsieur d'Avaray says? Surely no doubt is possible."

"No doubt would have been possible if the plan for which we had laboured had been executed. If the weapons of success of which I had obtained possession had been wielded."

D'Entragues took a step towards him. The Regent and d'Avaray leaned forward. From the three of them simultaneously came the awed question: "What do you mean?"

"I should not be troubling you with this report if the Baron de Batz had not desired me to lay it before you," said André-Louis by way of preface. Then he explained himself. "On my return from Blérancourt with those proofs which I had employed my wits and risked my head to obtain, I made the discovery that during all those months when I had been braving death in Paris in the service of the monarchical cause, the head of that cause had been taking advantage of my absence to seduce the lady whom he knew was promised to me in marriage. It is only now, since my arrival here this morning, that I have discovered the full extent of this betrayal. So as to remove the barriers which the lady's honour and loyalty must present to his ignoble aims, this disloyal prince did not scruple to have me represented as dead, and

to suppress my letters to her which would have proved me living. An incredible story is it not, messieurs?"

In the momentary pause that he made, they were too dumb-founded to interpose a word. Dispassionately he continued.

"When I discovered this, I perceived that no good could come to any country under the rule of a prince so treacherous and base. Therefore I thrust into the fire those papers which by destroying the Robespierrists must have opened the gates for your highness's speedy return to France.

"That is all my report, messieurs," he concluded quietly. "I should not, I repeat, have troubled to journey here to make it, but that the Baron de Batz considered that your highness should have it. He perceives a moral in the tale, which he hopes—since he remains behind to continue to labour in your service—your highness will also perceive, and, perceiving it, perhaps study to become worthy of the high destiny to which you may yet be called."

"You dare?" said d'Avaray, leaping to his feet

"Oh no. These words are not mine. They are the message from Monsieur de Batz. Myself, I nourish no such hope. If I had no illusions on the subject of the gratitude of princes, at least I had illusions on the subject of their honour when I set out at the risk of my life to become a kingmaker. But it has never been among my illusions that a man can run counter to his nature." He shrugged, and ceased at last, his dark eyes travelling from one to the other of them, the curve of his lips expressing his unutterable contempt.

The Prince sat back, white to his twitching mouth, his body limp. D'Avaray, with eyes flaming in a livid face, remained standing where he had risen. D'Enragues, the only one to preserve his colour, faced André-Louis at closer quarters and coned him with narrowing, wicked eyes.

"You scoundrel! Not only have you committed this atrocious crime, but you dare to come here and tell us of it to our face, so lost to respect of his highness that you can permit yourself to speak as you have done."

"Did you use the word 'respect', Monsieur d'Enragues?" He laughed into the dark countenance that was within a foot of his own. "It need not surprise you or him that my feeling is something very different. Let him be thankful that his royal blood places him beyond the reach of the satisfaction it is my right to claim."

The Regent rocked in his chair. "This insolence! My God this insolence! To what have I fallen?"

"To what, indeed!" said André-Louis

But now, d'Avaray, quivering with anger for his master, came swiftly round the table. "It shall be punished, *monseigneur*. I claim to act for you where your rank forbids you to act for yourself." He confronted André-Louis. "That for your insolence, you poor rascal," he said, and swept his fingers across the young man's cheek.

André-Louis fell back and bowed to him, even as the Regent struggled to his feet.

"No, no! D'Avaray! It shall not be. I forbid it, do you hear? I forbid it. Let him go. What do his words matter? You cannot meet a man so base, a nameless bastard. To the door with him. D'Entragues, Monsieur Moreau to the door."

"The door for me, certainly, Monsieur d'Entragues" said André-Louis and turned on his heel.

D'Entragues, stepping swiftly ahead of him flung wide the door, and stood haughtily aside to let him pass. On the threshold André-Louis paused and turned.

"I am lodged at the Two Towers, Monsieur d'Avaray. And I shall be there until to-morrow if you want me, or if you feel that this is a matter which you may pursue in honour."

But the Regent anticipated his favourite. "If you are still there to-morrow, by God I'll send my grooms to give you the thrashing you deserve."

André-Louis smiled his contempt. "You are consistent, *monseigneur*." And on that went out, leaving rage and shame behind him.

CHAPTER XLV

BACK TO HAMM

ANDRÉ-LOUIS carried away from the Casa Gazzola a bitterness that choked him. For all the calm self-command he had exhibited to the end, he had that day torn open again the dreadful wound in his soul so that the Regent might behold it. And the compensating satisfaction to him had been less than he had thought to find in the discharge of that scornful errand upon which de Batz had sent him.

He had failed, he knew, to pierce the armour of egotism in which Monsieur was empanoplied. Monsieur, whilst affronted and angry, had yet remained untouched in his conscience by any sense of having merited the outrage to his dignity which André-Louis Moreau had perpetrated. He resented the words uttered in his presence much as he might have resented an offensive gesture from some urchin in the streets of Verona. Fools and egotists remain what they are because of their self-complacency and lack of the faculty of self-criticism. It is not within their power to view their actions in the light in which they are revealed to others. Blind to the cause which they may have supplied, they have only indignation for effects which are hostile to themselves.

Something of this André-Louis considered as he rode back to the Two Towers. It did not sweeten his mood or provide balm for his suffering. His vengeance had failed because the man at whom it was aimed could not perceive that it was deserved. It required more than words to hurt such men as the Comte de Provence. He should have given them more. He should have insisted upon satisfaction from that fool d'Avaray. Or better still, he should have put a quarrel upon d'Entragues, that sly scoundrel who had played the pander to the extent of suppressing his letters, or, at least, of being a party to their suppression. He had forgotten d'Entragues' part in the business in the concentration of his resentment against the chief and unassailable offender. But, after all, it was no great matter. What real satisfaction could lie in visiting upon those lackeys, d'Entragues and d'Avaray, the sins of their master?

As he dismounted in the courtyard of the Two Towers he was suddenly overwhelmed by a sense of his aimlessness. It was as if his life had suddenly come to an end. He knew not whither now to turn his steps, for nowhere did any purpose await him.

The landlord met him on the threshold with the information that a room had been prepared for him, and at the same time with a message from Madame de Plougastel, requesting him to wait upon her at the earliest moment.

"Conduct me to her," he said indifferently.

Still with the dust of travel upon him and his last unbroken, he was ushered into that same room in which a couple of hours ago he had left her. She was alone when he entered, standing by the window from which she had witnessed his return. She turned eagerly as the door opened, and came some little way to meet him. Her manner was strained and anxious.

'You are kind to come so promptly André-Louis I have so

much to say to you. You left so hurriedly before I could even begin. Where have you been?"

"To the Casa Gazzola to let them know that I am still alive."

"It was what I feared. You have not been imprudent? You have done nothing hasty or rash André-Louis?" She was trembling

His lips writhed as he answered her: "There was nothing I could do, madame. The harm is past repairing. I could only talk. I doubt if I impressed them."

He saw relief in her face.

"Tell me about it. Ah, but sit down, child."

She waved him to one of two chairs that stood by the window, and herself took the other one. He sank down wearily, dropping hat and whip upon the floor beside him, and turned all the misery of his haggard eyes upon her gentle, wistful, face

"You saw Monsieur?" she asked him

"I saw him, madame. I had a message for him from Monsieur de Batz." Briefly he repeated what he had told the Regent. She heard him out, a little colour creeping into her cheeks, a bitter little smile gradually taking shape about her sensitive lips. When at last he had done, she nodded

"It was merited. All of it was merited. Although in doing what you did in Paris you betrayed a cause, yet I cannot blame you. And I am glad with you that you had the satisfaction of telling him. Never think that the bitterness of it will not penetrate to his heart, or that he will not understand how his own treachery and disloyalty have brought this failure upon him. He is very fitly punished"

"I am not so easily satisfied, madame. I doubt if any punishment I could have visited upon him would have been enough to satisfy me for the ruin he has wrought in wantonness."

"Ruin?" she echoed. She was staring at him with widening eyes. "The ruin he has wrought?"

"Is that too much to call it?" He was bitter. "Can any power undo it, or repair it?"

She paused before replying. Then quietly asked him: "What has been reported to you, André?"

"The vile truth, madame; that he made Aline his mistress; that he——"

"Ah no! That, no!" she cried, and came to her feet as she spoke. "It is not true, my André."

He raised his head, and looked at her with his weary eyes. "Pity misleads you into deceiving me. I have it on the word of a witness, and he a man of honour."

"You must mean Monsieur de La Guiche."

"How well you know. Yes, it was La Guiche who told me, without knowing how much he was telling me La Guiche who discovered her in the Regent's arms when he——"

Again he was interrupted. "I know I know Ah, wait, my poor André! Listen to me. What La Guiche reported that he had seen is true. But all the rest, all the assumptions from it are false False! And you have been tortured by this dreadful belief. My poor child!" She was beside him her hand upon his head soothing, caressing, gathering to her starved mother's heart some comfort for the comfort that she brought him. And whilst she went on to speak to give him the facts within her knowledge, he held his breath and kept his body rigid.

"How could you have thought that your Aline is of those who yield. Not even the belief in your death could have robbed her of her pure strength. Long and patiently Monsieur laid siege to her. In the end, I suppose, that patience wearied. He was required elsewhere. They were demanding his presence in Toulon. So, to be rid of Monsieur de Kercadiou, he sent him to Brussels on a pretexted errand, and went that night to bear Aline company in her loneliness. Feeling herself helpless because alone there, and terrified by his vehemence, she suffered the embrace which Monsieur de La Guiche surprised, and which Monsieur de La Guiche interrupted. Wait, André! Hear the end. The Regent left her upon the insistence of Monsieur de La Guiche who was very angry, and, I believe, very unmeasured in his terms, wanting even in respect to his highness. They went into another room, so that Monsieur might hear the message of which the Marquis was the bearer. No sooner had they gone than Aline came down to me with the tale of what had passed. She was filled with horror and loathing of Monsieur, and between terror of what had been and the fear of its repetition, she implored me to keep her with me and to shelter her." A moment Madame de Plougastel paused and then added slowly and solemnly "And she did not leave my side again until two days later after Monsieur had departed from Hamm."

André-Louis came to his feet. He stood before her, his eyes level with her own, his sight blurred.

"Madame! Madame! Is this the truth?" His tone was piteous.

She took his hands in hers. She spoke wistfully. "Could I deceive you, André-Louis? You know that whoever might lie to you, I never should. Not even out of charity my child in such a matter as this."

There were tears in his eyes. "Madame," he faltered, "you give me life."

She smiled upon him with an ineffable sadness. "Then I give it to you for the second time. And I thank God that it is in my power to give it." She leaned forward and kissed him. "Go to your Aline, André-Louis. Go with confidence. Give no further thought to Monsieur. You have punished him for the evil of his intentions. Be thankful that there was no more to punish."

"Where is she? Aline?" he asked.

"At Hamm. When we left to follow the Regent to Turin, Monsieur de Kercadiou had not yet returned from Brussels. So that she was compelled to await him there. Besides, she had nowhere to go, poor child. I left her money enough to suffice them for some time. Make haste to her, André-Louis."

He set out next day, fortified by the blessing and prayers of the gentle lady who was his mother, and who took consolation for the thought that perhaps she might never see him again in the reflection that he went at last to his happiness.

He spared on that journey neither himself nor horseflesh. He was well supplied with money. In addition to a bundle of assignats with which he had paid his way in France, he had received from de Batz at parting a belt containing fifty louis in gold to which he had scarcely yet had recourse. But he had recourse to it freely now. It went prodigally on horseflesh, and to surmount all obstacles and smooth all difficulties.

Within a week, on a fair April day, he came worn and jaded, but with his heart aglow, into the little Westphalian town on the Lippe. He rolled almost exhausted from the saddle at the door of the Bear Inn, and staggered across the threshold looking like the ghost for which he was presently to be taken.

When the gaping landlord in answer to his questions had told him that Monsieur de Kercadiou and his niece were above stairs, André-Louis bade him go tell the Lord of Gavrillac that a courier had just arrived for him.

"Say no more than that. Do not mention my name to him, within Mademoiselle's hearing."

Then he reeled to a chair and sank into it. But he was on his feet again a few moments later when his godfather came down in answer to the summons.

Monsieur de Kercadiou checked at sight of him, and changed colour; then uttered his name in a voice that rang through the inn, and came running to embrace him repeating his name again and again between tears and laughter.

André-Louis babbled foolishly in his godfather's arms.

"It is I monsieur my godfather. It is indeed I. I have come back. I have done with politics. We are going farming. We are going to my farm in Saxony. I always knew that farm would be useful to us one day. Now let us go and find Aline if you please."

But there was no need to go in quest of her. She was there mid-way upon the stairs. Her uncle's voice pronouncing André-Louis' name had drawn her forth. Her lovely face was piteously white, and she was trembling so violently that she could scarcely stand.

At sight of her André-Louis disengaged himself from the arms of Monsieur de Kercadiou, and casting off his weariness as if it had been a cloak, he leapt up to meet her. He came to a halt a step below her, his upturned face on a level with her throat. She put her arms round his neck, and drew his dark head against her breast. Holding him so, she whispered to him. "I was waiting for you, André. I should always have been waiting for you. To the end."

THE END

Nuptials of Corbal

CHAPTER I

SHADOWS moved behind the broad lattice that formed the upper part of the heavy wooden doors at the gallery's end. Those nearest, observing this and knowing what it portended, caught their breath. From these apprehension ran like a wave over the groups assembled in that long narrow avenue of doom, stilling their chatter as it went, until in a moment all was silence.

Upon that silence the rasping of a key in its lock rang like a pistol shot. One of the ponderous wings of the great door swung inwards. The turnkey entered, brawny and swarthy, his blue shirt gaping away from a broad hairy chest, a fur bonnet on his cropped head, a yellow bloodhound at his heels. He stood aside on the broad platform at the head of the steps, to give passage to a brisk young gentleman in a tight black frock and a round black hat that was adorned by a buckle in front and a cockade at the side. A paper in his hand drew the eyes—some scared, some apathetic, some proudly indifferent and some defiantly scornful—of the hundred or so men and women assembled there from their various quarters for the daily purpose of hearing that paper's contents. For this slim young gentleman, Robert Wolf, clerk of the Revolutionary Tribunal, was the adjutant of the Public Accuser. His paper bore the list over whose preparation Fouquier-Tinville had laboured half the night, in his little room in the Tower of Cæsar : that room of the Palais de Justice where he had his being, where he worked and slept, which he never quitted save to dine and to discharge before the Tribunal the dread functions of his office. For a man of unremitting zeal was this Fouquier-Tinville, a conscientious public servant who spared himself so little in his labours on behalf of the Nation that in the pursuit of duty he neglected himself, his health, his wife and his children.

The Citizen Wolf stepped briskly to the edge of the platform, placed himself so that the light should fall upon his paper, and disposed himself to read the names of those whom Fouquier-Tinville

summoned that morning to judgment : the *fournée*, or baker's batch, as it was called in the cynical jargon of the day.

Having chosen his position, the clerk waited until three men who followed him should come to a standstill, so that the hollow ring of their steps upon the planking should not obscure his utterance. Not on that account did they hurry themselves. Two of them, men of middle age, both dressed in black, one tall and portly, the other short and wizened, took their time deferentially from the third, who, walking a little in advance, appeared to conduct them.

This was Chauvinière, the Nivernais deputy, a tall slim fellow, of an age not over thirty, of a certain vigorous elegance of figure and poise, of a certain elegance even in his dress. He wore a riding-coat with broad lapels and silver buttons, the tails of which reached almost to the heels of his Hessian boots. Spotless buckskins cased his long, lean legs so closely that every muscle was defined, and a cravat of spotless white clothed his neck stiffly to the chin. He was girt by a tricolour sash, and a tricolour cockade adorned his grey hat, which was cocked in front, à la Henri IV, and surmounted by a panache of black plumes. Thus were his office and his sansculottism advertised, and if some there were who thought them advertised too elegantly for sincerity, our gentleman was not to be perturbed. His sansculottism stood too high, had been too fully proven to be shaken by any gibes at his apparel, whilst his arrogance, audacity and self-assurance were a panoply against vulgar criticism. These qualities were to be read in his lean, sallow countenance with its high-bridged nose, its curled upper lip and its keen light eyes under level black brows. There was a certain raffishness in his air, an indescribable quality that proclaimed him half gentleman, half valet ; half wolf, half fox.

With a leisureliness that took no account either of the waiting clerk or of the agonized suspense and the pounding of a hundred hearts in that assembly, which he eyed so coldly, Chauvinière selected his point of vantage, at a little distance from Robert Wolf, and descended the first step, so that his two companions in black immediately behind him obtained, from the summit of the platform, a clear view over his head.

His keen eyes raked the gallery and the men and women in that throng, most of whom were so scrupulously dressed that, saving for the absence of powder from their heads, they might have been gathered together for a levee. This was a daily miracle performed upon slender enough resources by the prisoners in the Conciergerie.

The deputy's hungry eyes quested on until they came at last to rest upon Mademoiselle de Montsorbier, standing slim and straight beside the chair into which her mother had nervelessly collapsed. Incredibly fearless and resolute she stood, with scarcely loss of colour to her lovely face. But the blue-green eyes dilated a little and flickered as they met the deputy's kindling glance. Her slight bosom moved perceptibly under its crossed muslin fichu, to betray a sudden agitation which not even the advent of the list had been able to arouse.

Chauvinière half turned to the men in black behind him. He said something in a low voice into an obsequiously lowered ear, and with his silver-mounted cane—the only weapon he carried—he deliberately pointed. Three pairs of eyes followed the direction of the pointing, and Mademoiselle de Montsorbier stiffened under that volley of glances to whose purport she possessed no clue, but which instinctively she felt to bode no good.

Then the pointing cane was lowered, and the three men ranged themselves decorously, as Robert Wolf began to call the names of the doomed. His voice droned emotionlessly. Like Fouquier-Tinville himself, he was simply a part of the great revolutionary machine. There was no personal responsibility in what he did, and it was not for him to indulge feelings and emotions over actions that were not his own. He was a voice, no more: the summoning voice of the Tribunal. Because practised in his functions, he paused after each name, so as to allow the hush to be resumed, lest the next name should be lost to his audience in the sounds that ensued upon each of his utterances. To answer each summons there would be now a gasp, now a rustling stir about a person named, now a sob of terror, sometimes a laugh, occasionally a reckless answer, and more occasionally still an outcry of hysterical panic quickly sinking into shuddering sobs.

The voice droned on :

"The ci-devant Marquis de La Tourette."

The Marquis, a middle-aged exquisite in a blue coat with silver lace, threw up his head—the handsome head that so soon would leave his shoulders—and sharply caught his breath. In an instant he recovered. He remembered what was due to his blood and his self-respect. He shrugged and smiled in deprecation, for all that his face was of the colour of chalk.

"It will break the monotony," he said softly to a neighbour, as the next name was being called.

"The ci-devant Comtesse de Montsorbier."

Madame de Montsorbier, a slender little woman of fifty, half rose from her chair, beginning an inarticulate cry on which she seemed to choke. Then her knees were loosened, and she sank down again, leaning sideways against her daughter. Mademoiselle de Montsorbier, rigid now and piteously white, set protecting arms about her half-swooning mother, listening the while to the clerk's voice and waiting to hear her own name, almost hoping to hear it, in her selfless anxiety to accompany her mother before the Tribunal and thence to the scaffold. All that she realized was that in her agony the frail woman who had borne her would require her as she had never required her yet. Solicitude for her mother effaced all consideration of herself and her own fate. That was the mettle of Mademoiselle de Montsorbier, and her deepest dismay was not reached until the list had come to an end without her own name having been pronounced.

The summoned twenty were passing out, some faltering, some in grim resolve, a few with histrionically jaunty ease after brief farewells.

Mademoiselle de Montsorbier heard as in a dream the Marquis de La Tourette's pleasant level voice, addressing the Duc de Chaulnes.

"For once I take precedence of you, Monseigneur."

To which his Grace retorted lightly :

"To my infinite regret, since we lose your pleasant company, dear Marquis. But we shall rejoin you presently, I trust, in Paradise. My compliments to Fouquier-Tinville."

Two gendarmes, coming she knew not whence, surged suddenly before her.

"The *ci-devant* Montsorbier," said one of them, and set a hand upon the drooping shoulder of madame.

Mademoiselle de Montsorbier turned to him, deserted for once by her self-possession, and unable in her mental distress to marshal her tumultuous thoughts into coherent expression.

"But it is my mother ! There is some error. She cannot go without me. You see how feeble she is. My name has not been called. It is an omission. You see that it is an omission. You will tell them that it is an omission. You will let me go with her."

Thus, in a confused torrent, the phrases tumbled from her lips.

The man looked at her sullenly, dubiously, his nether lip projected. He lowered his head. "Not our affair." He shook the Countess, who was not more than half-conscious. "You are to come along, *citoyenne*."

"But I may go with her ? I may go with her ?"

"It is not in the order."

Mademoiselle de Montsorbier wrung her hands. "But you can explain to your Tribunal !"

"Ah, bah ! What's your hurry to sneeze into the basket ? Your turn will come soon enough, citoyenne. Lend a hand, Gaston."

Between them the two men dragged the Countess to her feet, and half carried, half led her away. The girl sprang after them.

"I may come, too ; may I not ? I may . . ."

A blow in the stomach from the elbow of one of the guards cut short her breath, and sent her hurtling backwards. "Faith ! You're too cursedly persistent ! You make yourself a nuisance, my girl !"

She reeled to the wooden chair the Countess had vacated, struck her legs against its edge, and fell into it rather than sat down.

"Mother !" she gasped aloud, when at last her breath returned. "Mother !"

White-faced she sat, in stony, tearless grief, her long fine hands clutched between her knees.

Just so, a month ago, had her father been rent from them, to take his trial ; and hers it had been since then to comfort and sustain her mother. Now her mother, too, was gone, and alone ; that frail lady, who had never been alone, who was in all things helpless. She would not return. None of those who were summoned ever did return ; and they were few, very few, who escaped the chill caress of the guillotine to be set at liberty.

Why had she been left ? Why had it been denied her to continue to the end the only useful purpose she could serve in life ? What now remained for her ?

A voice was speaking at her elbow, a crisp, level voice, not unpleasant although pitched in a tone almost ironical.

"This is the young woman who claims your attention, citizens. You observe her listlessness, her unnatural pallor, the vacancy of her stare. Perform your office. It is not for me to direct you, or even to suggest ; but for you to judge."

She swung half round, looking up, challenge, defiance, alarm, all blending in her glance, like some trapped wild creature suddenly confronted by its trapper. She met the light eyes of Chauvinière, piercing, mocking eyes which she had grown to hate, and even to fear, she who had never before feared anything in all her proud young life.

A half-dozen times in the last three weeks had she found these eyes upon her in a questing, measuring, soullessly appraising glance which had scorched her from head to foot. Twice already had he found occasion to speak to her as he passed through the prisoners' gallery on a visit which appeared to have no other object but that of addressing her. Each time she had commanded herself so as to dissemble from him her resentment at the insult which his look and word conveyed, and so as to answer him with an icy dignity which placed a whole world between them. She would command herself now. He should never guess her fear of him, this dishonouring fear for which she loathed herself.

The two men in black were gravely considering her, the taller one leaning forward a little. He extended a plump hand, and took her wrist.

"Your pulse, citoyenne."

"My pulse?" She heard herself ask the question in a distant voice, and knew by the drumming of her temples that her pulses were galloping. Then, above considerations of herself, rose again the momentarily whelmed memory of her bereavement. "You, monsieur . . . citizen, citizen-deputy! They have taken madame my mother, and by an omission I have been left. Give order, monsieur, I implore you, that my name be added to the list of the day. . . ."

"Ah!" said Chauvinière, with so singular an emphasis that it arrested her intercession.

He looked at the men in black with a significant lift of his brows. "You hear her, citizen-doctors! Is that the request of a young woman who is sane? To desire—indeed, to implore—death at that age, when life unfolds itself like a perfumed rose, when the blood runs warm and clear! Is not that a sufficient confirmation of what already I suspected? But"—and again there was that flash of mockery from those light eyes—"it is not for me to influence your opinion. You must form judgment for yourselves. Proceed! Proceed!" He waved a hand, a hand that was long and slender as an aristocrat's, and as graceful in its gesture, which subtly blended invitation with command.

The doctors sighed and grunted. "For my own part," said the shorter one, "I do not like her eyes. This wild, hunted look, and this general expression of distraction . . . hem! Hem!"

"And then her pallor, as the citizen-deputy says," put in the other. "Most unnatural! And this pulse! But feel it for yourself."

She laughed. It was the laugh of a bitterness too sharp for tears.

"Unnatural! My pallor, my pulse, my hunted look! Unnatural! And my mother has just been taken from me, to judgment and the scaffold. You would have me calm, messieurs? Gay, perhaps? My mother . . ."

"Sh, my child!" The little doctor's hand was on her brow, his thumb was doing something with her eyelids. But his manner was soothing, almost hypnotic. "Do not exalt yourself, citoyenne. Calm, if you please! Quite calm! Here is no need for transports or excitement. We are your friends, citoyenne. Friends." He addressed Chauvinière. "What she says, of course, is just. The excitement of the moment, the unhappy event of which she has just been the witness, her natural pain at the . . ." His voice trailed into silence, leaving the sentence unfinished, for Chauvinière's black brows were knit in a frown that made him shiver.

"Of course, of course," said the deputy's voice, and it was cold as ice, or—thought the little doctor despite himself—as the knife of the guillotine: cold and sharp, incisive and sinister. "It is for you to form the opinion. Not for me to direct you. But you will remember—that is, if you consider my observations worth remembering—that I brought you here precisely because I have upon other occasions witnessed these same traits in the citoyenne, at times when no external cause could be discerned such as may be held fortuitously to have arisen now."

The little doctor clutched at salvation. "Ah, but that is decisive," he exclaimed with complete conviction of tone. "If these symptoms—this pulse, this pallor, these twitchings, this glassy stare and . . . and the rest—have been manifest constantly and without adequate cause, one conclusion only is possible. At least," he added with a glance at his colleague, "that is my opinion."

"And mine," said the other sharply. "Emphatically mine. It admits of no discussion. It leaps to the eye."

Chauvinière's lips momentarily twitched. "It is gratifying, citizen-doctors, for a layman to find his scientific suspicions confirmed by men of science. You will, then, certify the citoyenne, so that the Public Accuser may authorize her removal to a hospice, to the Archevêché, for instance."

"Justice demands no less," said the little man.

"And humanity," added the taller one.

"Naturally," said Chauvinière. "Justice and humanity must agree that this afflicted girl is in no case to plead, and the

Revolutionary Tribunal has too high a sense of its duties to wish to arraign a person who is, be it temporarily or permanently, without the wit to defend herself. If you will send your certificate to the Public Accuser to-day, your responsibility in the matter ends. Citizens, there is no reason to detain you."

He inclined his head in dismissal, haughty as a prince of the old regime. The doctors bowed low and obsequiously as if to the blood royal, and turned to depart.

"Ah, but wait!" cried Mademoiselle de Montsorbier on a sudden note of sharpness. "Sirs, sirs!"

But the deputy's commanding hand waved them definitely away. Then his eyes swung slowly to the girl's face. She was on her feet now confronting him, and she was, or appeared to be, entirely fearless.

"Is it pretended that I am mad?" Her question was a challenge.

He admired her spirit, and commended the fastidiousness of the instincts which had rendered her desirable in his eyes. She was too fine, too clean-cut and delicately shaped to make appeal to a man of coarse sensibilities. His discernment had perceived in that slender lissom body a spirit over which no gross fellow could ever hope for empire. He was something of a student, this Chauvinière—who in pre-revolutionary days had been, like so many others who were on the summits now, a failure as a man of law. He was, too, something of a poet at heart, and something of an epicure in sensations. He knew that abiding beauty is of the mind, and that where beauty of the mind is absent a superficial beauty of the body will soon grow nauseous.

The spirit which she now displayed, standing tense, defiant, almost scornful to challenge him, confirmed his first discernment. He smiled a little.

"Must you quarrel with a pretence which will give you life, which will snatch you from under the knife of the guillotine? If you do, and at your age, then you are as mad as they are about to certify you."

A dozen questions leapt to her tormented mind. She uttered one.

"What is your interest in me, monsieur, that my life should be your concern?"

"Ah, that!" His dark brows went up, a faint smile illumined his face, a smile so gently wistful that it almost rendered sweet and delicate his whole expression. "Citoyenne, you ask too many questions; more than it would be discreet to answer. I take my leave."

He doffed his plumed hat and bowed, then turned and walked away, erect, his head thrown back, looking neither to right nor to left upon the aristocrat prisoners who made way for him. He ignored alike the malevolent glances of the men and the insults of the women expressed in a hasty drawing aside of skirts lest they should become contaminated by contact with his person.

He was a man who succeeded by disregarding trifles.

CHAPTER II

THE Citizen-Deputy Chauvinière, representative in the National Convention of the constituency of Nevers, chose, as became a legislator of his notorious zeal, to make an inspection of the Archevêché, the whilom Palace of the Archbishop of Paris, now converted into a hospital for prisoners.

Baziret, the doctor in charge, conducted him, and was filled with terror by the deputy's uncompromising denunciations of the manner in which he found the place conducted, the abominable overcrowding, the mephitic atmosphere, the general insalubrity.

"This is not human," he declared, as they turned away from a suffocating gallery. "After all, they are men, not beasts; and although they have not yet been tried, already it seems they are subjected here to punishment such as the Nation could not desire for her vilest malefactors. They are flung to lie in straw like swine, men and women who are ill, some of them already dying! And you pack sixty into a space that could conveniently contain not more than thirty! It is inhuman, barbarous, almost beyond anything ever perpetrated by the despots."

Under those stern light eyes the portly Baziret trembled in body and in soul.

"What would you, citizen-deputy? Every day the authorities send me more of these sick from overcrowded prisons in which they cannot do other than fall ill. And my resources,

then ! They are utterly inadequate. The space at my command here is what you see. I cannot build new wings to the Archevêché."

"But you can keep clean the space you have ; and you can avoid being pert with me, if you please. I dislike pertness. It is the sign of a shallow mind."

"Pert ? I ?" The doctor descended to further depths of panic. "Oh, but citizen-deputy, I assure you . . ."

"Enough !" His peremptoriness was terrific. "Also, I dislike servility. It was well enough in the days of Capet. It will not serve in a glorious age of Reason, when all men are free, when all men are equal, when all men are brothers. There are no masters now. Do you understand ?"

"Oh, but perfectly, citizen-deputy."

"I congratulate you. Let us pass on." Never was demeanour of Sultan towards a slave of his household more contemptuous. "What have you above ?"

"Above ? Oh, above !" The doctor had fondly imagined the inspection at an end. "Oh, but nothing that deserves your trouble."

"All things deserve trouble at the hands of a zealous servant of the Nation. Make a note of that, citizen-doctor. It may stimulate your own zeal."

The browbeaten man of medicine bowed in silent awe.

The Apostle of Liberty and Fraternity continued :

"Conduct me, if you please." And he waved a hand upwards. "The state of things I find here is to be the subject of a report I shall present this evening to the Convention. This scandal must be brought to an end."

The doctor, his hand upon the baluster, his foot in its neatly buckled shoe upon the first step of the staircase, paused and turned. His face was grey.

"In justice, citizen-deputy, you cannot lay this . . . this scandal to my charge. I . . ."

"You waste my time ; and my time belongs to France. It is necessary to remind you of the most obvious things. You may depend, citizen-doctor, upon strictest justice. The reign of injustice ended with the abominable regime of the despots. I shall report as I find." He relented a little from his austerity. "So far I have no fault with you, personally. You have been frank. You have concealed nothing. You have placed no difficulties in the way of my investigations. All of which is in your favour. Continue so, and you shall have no cause to fear my report. What do you hide above-stairs ?"

The doctor breathed freely at last. He even ventured a little laugh as he replied : "Hide ? Hide, citizen-deputy ? But what should I hide ?"

"That is what I am asking you."

"Oh, but nothing. Nothing. All is open for your inspection." They began to ascend the broad staircase. "Here above are a few persons whom it has been necessary to segregate, a few unfortunates who have been certified as demented."

"Demented !" Chauvinière seemed surprised. "So that to a hospital in which already there is not room for the sick, they send also those who should be in a madhouse ! What infamy !"

Baziret agreed as he would have agreed with anything the august deputy might say. If those upper chambers could be cleared of their tenants, he might establish there another ward, and thus relieve the congestion below. "The mad," he deplored, "take up so much room."

"I've noticed it," said Chauvinière. "They overcrowd the world."

On the upper floor the inspection was resumed. Baziret unlocked door after door of those chambers of solitary confinement, disclosing here an old man, there an elderly aristocratic woman, and in each chamber the same simple arrangement of deal chair and deal table and in a corner of the floor a mattress and blankets.

At last, to end the impatience which Chauvinière had perfectly dissembled, Baziret unlocked a door to reveal the person who was the cause of all this zeal on the deputy's part ; the person for whom, or for his own ends with regard to whom, he burrowed in all that he now did and was presently to do. And so deep underground and so skilful was his burrowing that on the surface of things there was nothing to betray his labours.

Mademoiselle de Montsorbier occupied the room's only chair, which she had placed by the barred window. She turned her head as the door opened, and started a little at sight of Chauvinière, who considered her judicially, without any sign of recognition. He found her paler than her wont, her eyes a little strained, her features a trifle drawn. But in the main less changed perhaps than he had expected after the week that had passed since her mother's execution and her own removal from the Conciergerie ; and the change, he observed with that discriminating eye of his, was not at all disfiguring. Suffering had heightened her spiritual, ethereal air. Inwardly he spared a sigh for the philosophic reflection that suffering is, after all, man's most refining influence.

"Who is this?" he asked coldly.

Baziret informed him, what time Chauvinière continued to regard the patient.

"Ha!" he said at last. "My faith, she does not look mad, that one."

"Alas! Often is it so with them. Their appearance deceives the shrewdest."

"But if you doctors may be deceived one way, you may also be deceived another." He fixed Baziret with eyes of terrible suspicion. "I can even imagine circumstances in which you might desire to be deceived."

Baziret shivered. "You mean, citizen?"

"Ah, bah! You understand me well enough. This girl, now . . ." He broke off, considering her again, chin in hand. Then abruptly, a man who takes a sudden resolve, he waved the doctor away. "I'll talk to her," he said. "It is my duty to satisfy myself in every case where . . ." Again he broke off. "Wait for me at the end of the corridor. Out of earshot."

The doctor bowed again in his scared obsequiousness, and was gone. Chauvinière's eyes followed him. They were sly, mocking, contemptuous. At last he stepped within the room, and closed the door.

"That comedy is played," he said gently, as if taking her into his confidence, as if making her a partner in his intentions.

"You play comedy, monsieur?"

Calm and level came the question in that pleasantly modulated voice. It startled him. He inclined his head a little.

"To serve you, citoyenne."

She had risen, and stood now straight and slim in her muslin fichu and full petticoat, which was in broad stripes of blue on grey. Her back was to the window and the pale gold of the March sunlight, so that her face, in shadow, remained indistinct. Her voice, however, assured him of completest self-possession.

"But it is not a comedy of manners, I think."

"Of manners?" He was piqued. Her meaning escaped him, and he did not like meanings to escape him. It did not often happen. "And why not of manners, if you please?"

"Because for that you have forgotten something."

"What have I forgotten?"

"To remove your hat."

The audible arresting of his breath betrayed his amazement. Then laughter broke across his face: broadly, but silently, for he remembered the doctor at the end of the corridor.

"They are right to have certified you mad, citoyenne," he said softly. "Decidedly you must leave here for a madhouse."

She shrank until her shoulders touched the bars of the window.

"What horror! What infamy! You know, you know that I am not mad. It was by your contriving that . . ."

"Sh! Hush! Hush! Name of a name!" His alarm was real. His eyes swept uneasily to the door. His head inclined a little, like one who listens. "Talk so, citoyenne, and you destroy us both."

She trilled a note or two of laughter, in mockery of him and his sudden fears.

"In this land of freedom, monsieur, in this Age of Reason of which you are one of the priests, surely a woman may destroy herself without comment if she will. And as for your destruction: can you conceive that it would concern me?"

He sighed. "I have admired your spirit, citoyenne. I begin to fear you have too much of it." He approached her by a step or two. "You are very young. Can you already have been so robbed of what we call illusions that you must count every man your enemy? If so, then it would be idle to protest that I am your friend; that I labour to give you back the liberty and the life which at your age should be very dear and precious; that to this end I have schemed and wrought, and to this end am ready to continue even at the risk of my own neck. If you are not convinced by the evidence already afforded you, if you are unwilling to stake upon it your life, which otherwise is forfeit, then, citoyenne, I had better depart again and leave you to your fate. It would imperil me too deeply to labour to persuade you: just as it might imperil me to be found bareheaded here, which is the only reason why I did not remove my hat."

Conviction of one injustice done may often temper a whole outlook. And Mademoiselle de Montsorbier, feeling herself convicted now in the trivial matter of his hat, wondered whether she might not, after all, have judged him as rashly and by inferences as faulty in those other graver matters.

She considered him, and found in him now a certain dignity, which was not without appeal.

"But why," she asked quietly, "should you desire to serve me?"

A smile momentarily softened his saturnine countenance. "I do not believe a man has lived since the world began who did not at some time desire to serve one woman."

That was plain enough, and the traditions in which she had

been reared rendered it an insult in her eyes. She let him see this clearly in her sudden stiffening, the up-tilting of her chin, the frown above her blue-green eyes and the angry flush that stained her delicately tinted face.

"You forget your place, sir," she told him, speaking as to an impertinent groom. "You presume insufferably."

If it stung him, he betrayed no hurt. His gentle smile grew even gentler, sadder. It was within his considerable psychological knowledge that he who would gain empire over a woman must begin by making himself her slave.

"Presume? Is it presumption to state an historical truth? Do I ask for anything? Do I demand wages for the service I proffer? I am at your command, citoyenne, to save your life, because . . ." He paused, and made a little gesture of self-deprecation. "Because the desire to serve you, without guerdon or hope of guerdon, is stronger than myself. Is that to presume?"

"No, monsieur. It is to be incredible."

Gravely he considered her, standing there so slim and straight, a figure almost boyish save for the slight swell under her muslin fichu, her delicately featured face so supremely composed, and the sunlight behind her setting a glowing nimbus about her golden head.

"Incredible, yes," he agreed at last. "I have often been accounted that. There is a twist in my nature. My mind was cast in an ironical mould. The unexpected beckons me. One of these days it may beckon me to my destruction. But I shall go with a smile, savouring the moment." He waited for no answering comment, but swept on, quickening his tone to a brisker pace. "We waste time, citoyenne. Listen, and afterwards resolve yourself. You will have time for thought between this and the event. Mistrust me, and remain to be presently guillotined; or trust me and let me lead you back to life. That shall be as you please. I offer; but I do not persuade. Listen, now."

Swiftly, briefly, he traced for her the course of events to come. He would procure the removal of the mental cases in the *Archevêché* to a madhouse in the *Rue du Bac*, whence evasion would be easy. The removal would take place in the course of the next day. As soon as it was effected, he would depart for the *Nivernais*, being already commissioned by the Convention to undertake there a tour of inspection. His passports were ready, and they included a non-existent secretary. That was the place that she should fill, if she so decided, suitably dressed in

man's attire for the purpose. Let her take time for thought, and let him know to-morrow, when he sought the house in the Rue du Bac, how she decided. He hoped that she would choose wisely. In the Nivernais she would be free to go her ways, and no doubt would know how to find shelter there in her native province and perhaps procure assistance to enable her to quit France should she so desire it. "We are Nivernais both," he ended by reminding her. "Perhaps it is compatriotism that strengthens my interest in you." He flashed a quick glance at the door, then, at last, swept off his hat, and bowed low. "My homage, citoyenne. I take my leave."

He was gone, abruptly, giving her no time to answer, leaving her there frowning in perplexity and buffeted between the fear of death and mistrust of her preserver.

That night, from the height of the tribune in the hall of the Convention, Chauvinière inveighed furiously against the prison system, and the state of things he had found in the overcrowded prison hospital of the Archevêché. He was superb in his audacity, fulminating in his irony, which spared none of those responsible, nor hesitated to indict even the Minister of Justice, Camille Desmoulins. He claimed to speak in the name of Humanity, consumed by the fire of a just and righteous indignation.

A deputy from the lower Loire ventured to interrupt him with a gibe that drew some applause from the crowded assembly.

"Monsieur le President, will you permit this man to continue his monstrous advocacy of amenities for aristocrats?"

Chauvinière, standing very straight and looking very tall, his black head thrown back, his fine hands resting, one on either side of his plumed hat, on the ledge of the rostrum, stamped out at once the sparks of that spluttering applause.

"Aristocrats?" His voice broke about the heads of the deputies like a peal of thunder, and again: "Aristocrats?"

The silence was instantaneous. His indignant, questioning outcry had caught their attention. He paused now, and his sardonic imperious glance sought out that daring fellow from the Loire, and riveted him. He knew the value of suspense, and for a long moment he held them in it. Then he loosed his answer:

"In a Nation of free men, Justice, citizens, should at once be inexorable, blind and indiscriminating. She can admit neither prejudice nor preconception, for these indeed are the negation of justice. In her divine eyes, which the ancients in their wisdom symbolically bandaged, there are neither aristocrats nor plebeians, but only accused. And lest Justice err in her findings—a danger revolting to enlightened men in this Age of

Reason—she must presume the accused to be innocent until her own sifting of the evidence constrains her to convict them."

Applause rolled in volleys down that long hall.

Chauvinière, who knew so well the power of words and how to wield them, knew also the value of dramatic poise. He remained now calm, precise, unmoved: the complete patriot with a duty to perform, who himself was nothing. No longer did his eyes seek out his erstwhile interrupter, lest he be suspected of gloating over the man's discomfiture. He did not even perceive—at least he did not return—the approving smile of the Deputy for Arras, that notorious humanitarian, the frail and livid Maximilian Robespierre, who removed one of the two pairs of glasses from his uptilted nose, to beam upon the vehement tenant of the tribune.

After that the success of his advocacy was no longer in any doubt. His demand that as a commencement of reform the mental cases should instantly be removed from the Archevêché, so as to afford the sorely needed space for other sufferers, was unanimously supported.

As he descended the steps of the tribune he reflected with cynical amusement that the blue-green eyes of Mademoiselle de Montsorbier were becoming responsible for internal politics in France. But there was, he also reflected, ample precedent in history from the days of one Helen, the shape of whose nose had brought about the siege of Troy.

CHAPTER III

DUMEY, the middle-aged physician who controlled the madhouse in the Rue du Bac, received a visit late in the afternoon of the following day from the Deputy Chauvinière. The deputy came in a travelling chaise, from which he removed a valise together with himself.

This he set down in the doctor's private room. He came straight to business in his peremptory, overbearing fashion.

"Among the demented prisoners entrusted to your care this morning is a *ci-devant*, a *Citoyenne de Montsorbier*."

"Ah yes!" The plump doctor's countenance became eager. "Her case."

"Never mind her case. She is dead."

"Dead!" Dumey looked thunderstricken.

"Isn't that why you have sent for me?"

"Sent for you? But I didn't send for you."

"You are losing your memory, Dumey. Fortunately for both of us, I am not." His note was suddenly hard and faintly sinister, for all its eternal mockery. "You sent for me, as the nearest responsible member of the government, to assure myself of the decease, and countersign the death certificate which you are about to draw up and sign. My own signature will be witnessed by my secretary. He will appear presently. Now, pray conduct me to view the body."

Dumey looked at his visitor long and hard. There was that between them on the subject of which a word from Chauvinière would send Dumey's head rolling into Sanson's basket: which was precisely why, of all the madhouses in Paris, Chauvinière had chosen this establishment in the Rue du Bac for the reception of the patients removed from the *Archevêché*. Against this danger on the one hand, Dumey had to set, on the other, favours received from the deputy and no doubt to be continued, one of which, indeed, was the present flow of patients to his house and his own consequent enrichment.

On both scores, whatever Chauvinière commanded, Dumey must perform. This even to the unquestioning risking of his head, since if he failed its removal was assured.

Dumey smiled at last his understanding and shrugged his resignation. "The responsibility . . ." he was beginning a little timidly.

"Will be mine, since I countersign your certificate. Hold your tongue, and no question of responsibility will ever arise. There will be no questions about any of your inmates for at least a month. When they come, you present your certificate. It will be too long after the event to admit of traces."

Dumey bowed, and conducted him. When he had unlocked the door of a room above-stairs he would have led the way in, but the deputy arrested him.

"Wait outside, or, better still, go wait below in your room. You will the more easily forswear yourself if you do not see your patient again alive."

"But I shall have to see her. I . . ."

"You are mistaken. You will not. Go. Don't waste my time."

Dumey departed. Chauvinière entered the room, carrying the valise.

Mademoiselle de Montsorbier, forewarned of his presence by his voice, was already standing to receive him. He bowed to her deferentially, and this time he was so unrepugnant as to remove his hat. Then he placed the valise on the table in mid-apartment.

"You have taken your resolve, citoyenne?" he said, between question and assertion. He had no doubt in his mind, this psychologist, that time and thought must have brought a person of her age to one conclusion only. It is very difficult to die willingly at twenty.

"I have resolved, monsieur," she answered him with quiet dignity.

"Citizen," he corrected her sharply. "There are very few monsieurs left in this country, and these are being guillotined so fast nowadays that presently there will be none at all. If you have resolved to live and to accept my good offices, citoyenne, you will oblige me by adopting at least the more obvious terms of our vocabulary of Liberty."

He had that preciseness of delivery which is so often the reflection of the ironical mind. Mademoiselle de Montsorbier began to discover in it a certain elusive quality of humour, but could not be sure whether this was conscious or unconscious, whether this member of the Convention was intentionally ironical or merely priggish, like so many of his colleagues.

She was scanning him closely now with those grave eyes of hers, seeking in his countenance an answer to her unspoken question.

He smiled as if he read her thought. "And you have resolved to live," he said. "That is very wise."

"I haven't said so." His penetration alarmed her a little.

"No? But I take so much for granted." He was apologetic. "I assume it from your calm, from the absence of defiance in your reception of me. It would desolate me to learn that I am mistaken."

"Mons . . . citizen, if I have misjudged you, I hope that you will have the generosity to forgive me. I . . . I hesitate to express myself upon your . . . your concern, your kindness."

"Continue to hesitate. Expressions waste time, and we have none to spare." He threw open the valise. "Here, citoyenne,

are the garments in which you will travel." He drew some of them forth. She recoiled, her face on fire.

"These ! These ! Impossible !"

"Oh, not impossible. Not at all impossible. A little difficult, perhaps. But I trust the difficulty will be overcome. If you will study the garments, the mystery of how they should be donned and worn will gradually vanish."

"That ! But that is not the difficulty. You misunderstand me purposely."

"In the hope of making you perceive the absurdity of your qualms. My secretary cannot travel in a striped petticoat, and you will find these breeches . . . but there ! We have no time to lose. I efface myself that you may make haste. When you are ready you will find me in the corridor."

A half-hour or so later, by when the deputy was in a ferment of impatience, a stripling figure in round hat, black riding-coat, boots and breeches emerged from the lady's room. A moment Chauvinière detained her, to scrutinize her with an eye that missed no detail. Thus dressed she looked shorter by some inches, but her figure was well enough, and the queue of her hair had been cleverly contrived. He approved her in a word, and hurried her below. Dumey awaited them, his certificate prepared. That business was soon over, and the Deputy Chauvinière with his secretary closely following entered the waiting chaise. Dumey closed the door upon them, and they were driven away.

No word passed between them until they were approaching the barrier, when Chauvinière handed his companion a bulky portfolio of black leather, partly opening it as he did so : "The passports are there on top. You will present them when they are demanded. It is in your office. No need to speak."

They drew up before the iron gates at the end of the Rue d'Enfer.

An officer in a blue coat with red woollen epaulettes (gold having been abolished as unbecoming an age of equality) pulled open the door and peremptorily challenged the travellers.

"Who goes there ?"

It was Chauvinière who from his corner drawled the answer :

"The Citizen-Deputy Chauvinière, Representative en Mission. Show him the papers, Antoine, and let us get on."

From under his lashes he watched his companion, ready to intervene at the first sign of blundering. But there was no such sign. Unflinching she took from the portfolio the papers he had designated, and proffered them with a hand that did not even tremble.

The officer, who had put aside a good deal of his peremptoriness upon learning with whom he had to deal, scanned the papers, returned them, saluted stiffly, and carefully reclosed the door. Then his voice rang out in command :

"Pass the Citizen-Representative Chauvinière."

The iron gates creaked open, the driver cracked his whip, the guard presented arms and they rolled past the barrier and were out of Paris.

"We've crossed the Rubicon," said Chauvinière in his driest tone, and flung himself back in his corner, his long lean legs thrust straight before him. Thus reclining he furtively continued to observe his companion. She was composedly refolding the papers and replacing them in the portfolio. His wonder, his admiration, was so strong upon him that he uttered his thought aloud :

"My faith ! But you have spirit !"

She snapped the lock of the portfolio, and looked at him, smiling a little.

"It is in the blood," she said quietly. "You would not know that. Hence your surprise. You will not have known many women of my class, citizen-representative."

A lesser man would have been angered by the implication, which he was not fool enough to suppose was other than deliberate. But Chauvinière possessed that rare quality of detachment which permitted him to admire deftness even when exercised to wound himself. He nodded his approval of her.

"I find you addicted to assumptions," he commented critically. "That, too, will be in the blood, and the cause of much of the shedding of it. Well, well ! Let us talk of other things. My duties take me to Nevers. This is Thursday. We should be there by Saturday night. I don't spare horses when I travel on the business of the Nation."

She had already formed a suspicion of this from the furious pace at which the chaise was now being driven. The deputy continued :

"What I propose for you is this." He paused, and in that pause she was conscious of a quickening of her pulses ; a shortening of her breath. But Chauvinière, watching her what time he deliberately tested her by this suspense, observed only her external unruffled calm. Slowly he proceeded : "Had you glanced at those passports you would have seen that their form is uncompromising. They command all, under pain of death, to afford us every assistance in their power on our travels in the prosecution of the Nation's business. When we reach Nevers,

I shall discover that I require precise information of events in the extreme east of Burgundy. Too preoccupied with affairs in the Nivernais to go myself, I shall decide to send you instead. For that purpose, and upon the authority of our passports, the Revolutionary Committee at Nevers shall supply you with the necessary safe-conduct, which will take you to the banks of the Rhône. After that, it will be for you—and you should not find it difficult—to discover means to cross into Switzerland, where you will be safe."

He ceased ; but her breathing did not yet resume the normal. What she heard seemed utterly incredible. It clearly announced him to be acting from purely altruistic motives, with no thought of personal gain. Was it possible that her plight, or something in herself, had indeed moved him to this compassionate protection ? Did such things happen, particularly at the hands of these human wolves who had made the revolution ?

In consenting to take advantage of his offer, she had not permitted herself to be deceived by the specious terms in which it was made. She had accepted a desperate chance, who otherwise was lost. In accepting it, she had prepared herself to depend upon her own strength, courage and resource, to seize and use such opportunity as might offer to cheat him of any gain he might look to make for himself, to ensure so far as might be possible to her that he should perform as he seemed to promise.

Had she dishonoured him by these thoughts ? Was this man, indeed, the selfless friend he protested himself, labouring for her salvation without hope of guerdon, as he had said ? It seemed to her clear mind fantastic. Yet what else was to be assumed from the intentions he had just disclosed ? Or was this merely a verbal opiate to lull her into a false confidence, so that she might lie the more utterly at his mercy ?

Thus her thoughts in the long spell of silence that followed his announcement, until at last he broke again upon them, compelling speech.

"You are silent, citoyenne. You do not entirely approve of my dispositions ? Or perhaps you have a better plan yourself ?"

"No, no. It is not that." She paused to control the slight tremor in her voice. In the half-light of that interior it seemed to him that she had grown a little paler, as he considered the sweet profile with its finely drawn lip and delicately arched nose. "I am deeply moved, citizen, by your thought for me, which has gone so deep in planning, by the disinterested nobility of your concern."

His light eyes flickered. It was like the momentary up-leaping and instant extinction of a flame in the dark. But she was not looking at him. She was staring straight before her.

"I have no words in which to thank you. I am dumb in my gratitude and wonder. Your plan for me seems everything I could desire. In Switzerland I have friends. I . . ."

Her voice faltered and trailed into silence. It was no pretence that she was moved, that her self-control was slipping from her. She was daunted by the very need to command herself, to be alert, vigilant and ready for emergencies which might creep up to pounce upon her unawares. Her brave spirit, which might have preserved its vigour in the presence of revealed danger, was being battered down by uncertainty and suspense.

Chauvinière's voice, soft as silk, speaking on a sigh, penetrated the distraction of her mind.

"In that case, since you so completely approve, we may consider the matter decided, and act presently as I have said."

He settled himself back into his corner, closed his eyes, and thereafter for some three hours which that journey endured he seemed to doze. It was as if his interest in his travelling companion were already diminishing now that the intended service was already half rendered and the remainder of it clearly plotted.

CHAPTER IV

THEY clattered over the kidney stones of Melun as dusk was falling and came to draw up at the Hôtel de la Nation—lately the Hôtel Royal. There, no sooner had a whisper gone forth from the postboy touching the identity of our traveller, than out came landlord, ostler and chamberlain to welcome him in trembling obsequiousness.

Chauvinière accepted this tribute to his greatness with a lofty disdain which few despots could have equalled, none surpassed. The best rooms were placed at the disposal of himself and his young secretary; the best supper Melun could provide was

prepared for his august consumption ; and a very choice old Burgundy was discovered in the cellar where it had lain neglected, and brought forth for the representative's delectation.

At table and thereafter his demeanour towards Mademoiselle de Montsorbier was of a correctness which could not have been exceeded by one of her own class. He was solicitous, but always deferential ; kindly, but never lacking in respect. And he entertained her presently with talk which displayed unsuspected depths of culture, acquaintance not only with the works of Scarron and Voltaire, but also with the classical authors whom he freely quoted. His personality began to abash her a little, in a measure as she discovered it so greatly to transcend all that at first she had suspected. He displayed a refinement almost incredible in one of his political creed ; his manners were impeccable.

When at last she retired for the night, she went in an uncertainty more profound than ever. He held the door for her, his head deferentially inclined, and with a courteously expressed wish for her good repose. Within her room, which was next to his own, a wave of panic suddenly swept over her. She drove home the bolts with which her door was furnished at base and summit, then went to open her window, so as to ascertain what line of retreat might be available in case of need. It was cold and drizzling and the night was overcast and very dark. But light from a ground-floor window showed her the gleaming cobbles of the yard, a good fifteen feet below. At need with a twisted sheet she might go that way. But what then ? Such a course was only to be contemplated in desperate case, and her case was not yet desperate. Indeed, she sought to assure herself, she had no cause to consider it desperate at all. She was a little coward, shuddering at shadows.

She was even more strongly of this opinion when she awakened in the morning, refreshed by unbroken sleep, the spring sunshine flooding her little white room, and realized on awakening how needlessly imagination had made a craven of her.

She came spruce and trim to breakfast, so spruce and trim that a serving-maid in the corridor gazed with a shy smile at the citizen-representative's young secretary, and may have been distressed by that austere young man's indifference to her charms.

Chauvinière was already at table. As there was a servant in the room, he did not rise. He nodded curtly, and his greeting had an edge.

"Ah, Antoine ! You slept well, I trust ?"

"Excellently, I thank you, citizen-representative."

"In future do not sleep quite so well, if you please. I dislike late-comers and young men who are reluctant to leave their beds. Your breakfast is cold, and the horses are already being harnessed. We set out in ten minutes. See that you are ready."

They travelled all that day at a furious rate, and with but two halts for food and rest and change of horses, so that before nightfall they had gone sixty miles and came to rest at Châtillon sur Laing, a village of the Orléannais. Here the experience of the previous night was repeated. Again Chauvinière observed a deference that was almost exaggerated, again he talked glibly and entertainingly, displaying, as it were, all the jewels of his mind to dazzle and beglamour her. She thawed a little. Indeed, it was impossible to remain frozen in aloofness under the glow of so much benignity. Yet once or twice, looking up suddenly, she caught his eyes upon her. They shifted instantly, and the wolfish expression she surprised upon his face was as instantly covered as if by a mask. But the impression of it remained upon her memory, to evoke a sudden ineffable dread, akin to that with which his eyes had smitten her in the Conciergerie.

He drank perhaps too much that evening, and in consequence slackened a little the reins of his self-control. For in holding the door for her departure and in wishing her good night, the leer on his face and the hungry glow of his eyes were unmistakable. Such was the fear they roused in her that, having locked and bolted her door, she flung herself fully dressed upon her bed, her mind in such a state of vigilance that she scarcely slept at all until the dawn. Yet nothing happened to justify her tremors of spirit, and when she came to breakfast she found herself awaited by a representative so correct and formal in his manner that she asked herself whether again her imagination had not tricked her on the previous night.

All day that question abode with her, whilst the chaise swayed and rocked in its headlong speed and Chauvinière half dozed in his corner with a disregard of her that was almost ungallant. It was still with her when at five o'clock in the afternoon, within a half-mile of La Charité, a village on the Loire, their journey came to a sudden lurching end as the result of the loss of an axle-pin, which, but for the postboy's quick perception, might have had more serious consequences.

Chauvinière climbed down, swearing savagely. It had been his purpose to reach Nevers that night, there to address a meeting of the Committee of Public Safety and so to plan that upon the

morrow he might set out upon his survey. That plan he must now abandon, and accept such a kennel as La Charité could offer his Republican sybaritism.

Yet when they had tramped the half-mile of muddy road to the village, they found there an excellent inn, where they were given a good room above-stairs in which to sup, with a bedroom opening from each side of it. Within an hour of their arrival an unusually good supper was placed before them by the vintner and his comely wife, who did not spare themselves in their endeavour to earn the commendation of the great man from Paris by whom, in their own words, their poor house was honoured.

Over the well-larded capon Chauvinière expressed himself to his secretary.

"By this I should judge that there is a good deal of aristocracy surviving in this Nivernais of yours."

"You should be thankful for that since it provides you with so good a supper."

"In this world, as you may come to find, the greater the cause for thankfulness on the one hand, the greater cause for repining on the other. It is thus that Fortune bestows her favours: taking payment always."

"The payment of a debt is no good cause for repining," she objected.

He looked at her, so intently, so inscrutably, that all her fears of yesterday evening suddenly returned, and she shivered. He observed it.

"You are cold," he said, and she fancied that the shadow of a smile swept almost imperceptibly across his lean face. "Let me close the window." He rose, and crossed the room; and it was whilst he stood with his back towards her, humouring the catch of the lattice, that she suddenly took her resolve to end this suspense, to put his intentions regarding her to an immediate test. And her fertile mind at once supplied the necessary elements. She waited only until he had returned to the table.

"You have been very good to me, incredibly good to me, citizen."

He paused to stare at her, his hand upon the back of the tilted chair.

"What need to speak of that?"

Her eyes were upon the coarsely woven tablecloth; between finger and thumb she was kneading a little ball of crumb.

"I must speak of it because the time has come to thank you; to thank you, and to part."

She looked up suddenly to surprise his expression and found it compounded of suspicion, anger and dismay.

"Part?" He frowned as he uttered the word. With heightened incredulity he repeated: "Part?"

She explained herself. "We are already in the Nivernais. It is my own country. I have friends throughout the province."

"Friends? What friends?" His tone suggested that their mention should be their death warrant.

"I will not name them lest I compromise them. That would not be fair to them, nor, indeed, quite fair to you. It might test your duty too severely. Neither would it be fair to you that I accompany you into Nevers in broad daylight to-morrow. After all, I was well known there not so many months ago. There will be many left who might recognize me. Seeing me in your company and thus, what could they assume? You would be compromised, and . . ."

"Compromised!" His scornful laughter shook the crazy windows. "And who in Nevers would dare to compromise me?"

She smiled upon him rather wistfully, slowly nodding her fair head. "You are of a high courage, citizen; of a reckless audacity, as I have observed. But I will not permit you to add to the heavy debt under which already I lie, the risk perhaps of your life. . . ."

"Tush! No more of that, citoyenne! I run no risk. But if I did, what then? My life is my own to risk as I choose, and not as you or any other presumes to permit. We are free men all in this reformed France." His tone resumed its habitual sardonic note. "And we need no permission for our acts. All that went with the days of tyranny."

"Your generosity cannot deceive me." Her blue-green eyes looked at him resolutely. "And that is why we part to-night."

He leaned forward across the board. His face was very grave. It had lost, or seemed to have lost, some of its habitual colour.

"You give me news, citoyenne. We part to-night, eh? To-night? So, so! And will you tell me where you are going?"

"I could not tell you that without compromising others."

He laughed. "You'll compromise the whole Nivernais before ever I let you go." The tone was fierce, snarling, as a dog snarls over a bone that is being wrested away. But immediately almost he had checked that too-revealing note. His voice was smooth again. "I mean, before I let you risk yourself in such a

fashion. You'll forgive my insistence, citoyenne. But I have not jeopardized my neck to save yours from the guillotine just to have you throw my gift away in sheer wantonness. Oh no. I shall make sure of your safety before I part with you." He sat down at last.

"But you said in Paris . . ."

"Never mind what I said in Paris." There was an angry rumble in his voice. Again it was the note of the dog about to be robbed of the bone he had looked forward to enjoying. "Consider only what I have said here. I do not part with you until I am assured of your safety."

She sat there facing him across the board with terror in her heart, her eyes dilating a little as they met now his smouldering glance, observed the flush on his prominent cheek-bones and the scowl on that lofty brow across which a clump of his moist black hair had fallen like a curtain.

She was answered. Her suspense, at least, her doubts and questionings were at an end. He was the wolf she had at first supposed him, and she was the prey he promised himself. Why, she wondered, did he stalk her so warily and patiently? It was not hers to understand the man's sybaritic fastidiousness, which rendered repugnant to him the notion of prevailing without real conquest.

Of her terror she permitted him to catch no glimpse. All that was disclosed to him by her rigid stare was surprise. Then the surprise passed, chased away by a smile, a smile of a sweetness and gentleness such as she had never yet vouchsafed him. She averted her eyes.

"Your generosity . . . your nobility leaves me without words. You bring me almost to tears, citizen ; tears of gratitude. And yet . . ."

"Add nothing more," he implored her. His voice grew hoarse. "You have yet to learn the depth of a devotion which would stop at nothing in your service, Cléonie."

One of his long arms came across the table, and his fine hand closed upon hers where it lay there beside her plate. A moment she let it remain, loathing his touch, repressing the shudder that might betray this loathing, and loathing herself for the duplicity to which circumstances compelled her to descend. Then, hot with a shame whose flush he entirely misunderstood, smiling with a rather piteous wistfulness, she gently disengaged her hand and rose.

"Suffer me to go," she begged him. "I . . . I am a little confused."

"No! Wait!" He too had risen, and stood eager beyond the dividing board, to him so inopportunistly placed.

"To-morrow!" she begged him faintly. "We will talk again to-morrow, citizen. Let me go now! Ah, let me go!"

Almost she overdid it, almost she overacted the suggestion of a spiritual struggle against the magnetism of his personality. With another, indeed, it might have been entirely fatal. But Chauvinière the psychologist knew the full value of restraint, knew how much more complete is the ultimate surrender to a generous opponent. He bowed low in silence save for a little sigh, and by the time he came upright again he was alone. She had slipped like a ghost into the adjacent room. He saw the white door close. He heard the bolts rasp home. He smiled as he stood there. Then he sighed again, still smiling, resumed his chair and poured himself wine.

Behind her bolted door Mademoiselle de Montsorbier stood breathless and a little faint. She leaned against it, listening to his movements, and gradually she resumed her self-command.

She crossed at last to the dressing-table, and by the dim light of the single candle burning there surveyed her face. She accused it of pallor, assured herself that there was nothing to be feared, then, drawing up a chair, sat down before her mirror, but made no attempt to prepare herself for bed.

Thus for a half-hour, at the end of which she heard the rasp of his chair in the outer room, followed by the sound of his pacing to and fro like a caged animal. Once his steps came right up to her door and paused there. She stiffened. She was conscious of the roughening of her skin, of the acceleration of her pulses as she waited through that pause, which seemed interminable, waited for his knock. It came at last, sharply rapped, and the sound brought her to her feet.

By a miracle she kept her voice steady. "Who is there?"

"It is I, citoyenne; Chauvinière."

"What do you want, citizen?"

There was a long pause before his answer came: "To warn you that we set out early in the morning. The chaise will be ready at eight o'clock."

"I shall be punctual, citizen. Good night!"

"Good night, citoyenne."

His footsteps receded. Scarcely crediting her ears she listened to them as they crossed the length of the outer room. Then she heard him pass into his own chamber, and at last came the closing of his door. She was able to breathe again. But it was in vain that she sought to explain that trivial incident. Had he

deliberately sought to scare her, merely so as to show that all fear of him was idle and thus lull her into a sense of false security, or had his action been genuine?

She crossed the room and flung herself upon the bed, fully dressed as she was, even to her riding-boots, but she left the candle burning and made no attempt to go to sleep.

With a patience and self-control that were miraculous considering what was in her mind, she lay thus, listening and waiting for a full two hours until she could be sure that the house slept. Then, at last, she rose, and removed her boots. She took up the guttering candle, and very softly withdrew the bolts of her door. Cautiously, soundlessly, she opened it, and soundlessly crept out into the room beyond, which now was all in darkness. A moment she paused listening. From beyond the far door came a sound of mild snoring. The citizen-representative was asleep.

With her boots in one hand and the candle held aloft in the other she tiptoed towards the door that opened to the stairs. Midway across the room she checked. Something gleamed lividly on a side table and drew her glance. It was the clasp of the representative's portfolio. She paused, hesitating, scared by the temptation that assailed her, to which at last, with a pale smile, she yielded. She snatched up the portfolio and tucked it under her arm. Then she passed out, and in her stockinged feet cautiously descended the creaking staircase.

In the passage below she paused to put on her boots. Then very carefully she drew the bolts of a side door, and stepped into the stable yard. Here a shock awaited her. Although it was past midnight, a light showed in the stables; the upper half of the stable door stood open, and above the closed lower half she beheld the bust of a man who leaned there, who had observed her exit, and who now straightened himself to challenge her. Instantly resolved, she forestalled him.

"Ah! You are astir! It is fortunate, for otherwise I must have fetched you from your bed. I need a horse at once, citizen."

"A horse? Name of a name! A horse at this hour?"

"Business of the Nation." The young secretary's voice was hard and peremptory. He flourished his portfolio. "I am to ride ahead of the citizen-representative into Nevers. There is urgency. Make haste, or you will answer to the citizen-representative."

The ostler asked no more questions. A horse was quickly saddled, and upon this the young secretary, with a seat suggestive of a huntsman rather than a clerk, vanished at the gallop into the night.

CHAPTER V

THE citizen-representative, newly risen, scrupulously shaved, his hair dressed as carefully as an aristocrat's, stalked into the main room between the bedrooms, calling briskly for chocolate.

Whilst he waited he sauntered to the window, and stood there considering the greyness and drizzle of that melancholy March morning. Presently, however, the general stillness about him smote his attention as a sudden sound might have done at another time. He cocked his head, listened for some movement from Mademoiselle de Montsorbier's room. The unbroken silence moved him apprehensively. He stepped swiftly to the door and rapped sharply with his knuckles. There was no answer. He tried the handle. It turned, and the door swung inwards, discovering to him the room's lack of tenant. He crossed the threshold, and gazed about him, frowning. He noted the bed, undisturbed save by an impression of her form so faint as to suggest that it was some hours since she had lain there, nor then had lain there long.

He stepped back, his face dark, his square chin thrust forward. His eyes sought the side table on which, as he remembered, he had too carelessly and trustingly left his portfolio. It was no longer there, which was already as he had expected. A moment yet he paused to make sure that it was not elsewhere. Then, with an oath, he flung headlong from the room, crashing into the serving-maid who was bearing him his chocolate. Her scream and the clattering smash of the scattered chocolate-service followed him as he bounded down the stairs, bawling for the innkeeper.

The innkeeper, terrified by the representative's torrential descent and tempestuous demands for his secretary, backed by horrible threats of the guillotine in the event of prevarication or evasion, quaveringly swore, by the God of the Old Regime and the Goddess of Reason of the New, that he knew nothing whatever of the missing person and that he learnt now for the first time of that person's absence. But the ostler, lounging near at hand and overhearing the angry interrogatory, came forward to supply the answer which was to quench Chauvinière's last lingering hope.

The citizen-representative stared at the mumbling oaf with such fierce flaming eyes that the fellow recoiled in dread.

"And you let him go?" said Chauvinière between his teeth. He was smiling terribly. "You let him go? Like that?"

"How should I have known that . . ."

"How should you know anything, animal? Brute beast, did it not occur to you that an honest man doesn't sneak away like a thief at midnight?" He smothered him in obscene epithets, cuffed him in his overpowering rage, and when the fellow protested against such treatment in the name of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity, cuffed him again more soundly.

"Will you raise your voice to me, carrion? If you must be talking, tell me at least which way he went. Use your worthless head, animal, or you may lose it over this."

The ostler answered at random that the youth had ridden off in the direction of Nevers.

At last Chauvinière controlled himself.

"Saddle me a horse," he commanded, and on that horse he was himself riding away to Nevers within ten minutes, leaving the postboy to follow with the chaise.

He rode at a pace which reflected the fury of his mind. More even than the loss of the girl did it enrage him to think that a man of his wit and acumen should have permitted that smoothly spoken, lying little aristocrat to have cheated him last night with her simpering pretence of yielding weakness, thereby fooling him into an exercise of idiotic patience so as to render his conquest ultimately more complete. He was rightly served for his imbecile forbearance. But when he found her, as find her he would though he destroyed a province in the search, she should mercilessly be taught what it meant to play comedy with the emotions of such a man.

He was very much the wolf that morning, the wolf questing for the lamb that has eluded him and licking his chops in anticipation of the voracious, unsparing feast to come when that lamb shall eventually have been overtaken and reduced into possession.

He paused at Rougues to munch a crust and drink a glass of brandy and water—for he had ridden away fasting from La Charité—then spurred on again, reaching Nevers at noon.

He went straight to the President of the Revolutionary Committee of Nevers, a heavy-bodied, lumbering tanner named Desjardins, and stated his immediate need. His papers had been stolen last night at La Charité by a youth whom he had befriended and whom he was now assured was a girl, a cursed aristocrat, no doubt. She was known to have ridden off in the direction of Nevers. She might attempt to pass herself off as Chauvinière's secretary. Her recapture was of the utmost importance. Heads

With that, the representative, who was half famished, went off to dine at the Auberge du Soleil, whither the chaise had been ordered to follow.

That the agents of the Committee were active is not to be doubted. In fact their activities were proved by the recapture on the morrow, near Châtillon, of the horse which the girl had ridden, and, later, by the discovery in a ditch near Souvigny of a black riding-coat, boots and other articles of apparel which Chauvinière recognized as those worn by the fugitive, as well as of an empty portfolio of black leather with a metal clasp, which the representative acknowledged for his own stolen property. Of the fugitive herself, however, there was no trace. The agents inclined to the convenient belief that she was dead, and pointed to the clothes as evidence.

Chauvinière withered them with his contempt. "Women do not undress themselves to die by the roadside, you imbeciles! Continue the search. It will be rendered more difficult by the fact that she has changed her apparel. But continue it. Put yourselves on the track of any stranger of whom you may hear. Strangers do not move unperceived in country districts. Display your zeal."

They returned to their quest, shrugging and grumbling among themselves and confiding in one another that the citizen-representative was an obstinate pig of a mule, an arrogant bully who gave himself the airs of an aristocrat and who would come to an evil end.

Days were added to those already spent, until their tale made up a week, during which Chauvinière sat brooding at the Sign of the Sun, snarling ill-humouredly at all who sought him, and giving, apparently, no thought to the affairs of the Convention, which were responsible for his visit to the Nivernais. When reminded of this by the greatly daring Desjardins, he first stormed at the audacity of the reminder, then swore profusely by the new gods and the old that the Nivernais should know of his presence. With that oath he took up his neglected duties, conquering his infatuation and vain regrets, and putting Made-moiselle de Montsorbier, at least for the present, from his mind.

And as he had wrathfully promised he performed. In that

month of April the Nivernais came to shudder at the name of a man who, whatever he may have been in the past, had never been wanton or crude in his cruelties and never bloodthirsty. From township to township he swept with the horrible paraphernalia of his justiciary's office at his heels, and ruthlessly practised in bloodshed the doctrines of the new Golden Age of Reason.

Throughout the Nivernais the Revolutionary movement had been conducted upon moderate lines. Therefore was there the more work for such a man in such a mood, and the more terrifying did that work appear to the inhabitants.

At last, towards the end of April, his dread progress brought him to the little hill town of Poussignot. If it had trembled at the news of his approach, it was almost prostrated with terror at the manner of his descent upon it. A military guard of honour escorted the travelling chaise in which he lounged in his grey coat, plumed hat and sash of office. In the wake of his carriage trailed a cart laden with baulks and beams of scarlet-painted timber, presently to be assembled into a guillotine and mounted in the market square. Upon the cart's grim load sat an obese, dull-eyed, phlegmatic man, the sight of whom sent a shudder through those who guessed his office. With him was an equally obese woman, blear-eyed, unkempt and slatternly, who drove the cart.

The Revolutionary Committee of Poussignot, which had been duly elected upon representations from Nevers a year ago, but which had never yet found occasion to function, was hurriedly summoned to assemble in the little town hall, overlooking the market square, where the carpenters were already busy with the erection of the scaffold. In muttering awe they awaited the coming of this dread man from the Convention, who was to rouse that sleepy and hitherto contented township from its Revolutionary languor.

He kept them waiting a full hour while he dined, careless of the time he thus wantonly wasted for them. He arrived at last, arrogant and overbearing in manner, arrogant and cruelly sardonic in speech. He found here in Poussignot a state of things which supplied ample material for the mockery which was never very distant from his outlook. Whilst France herself was clattering into ruin under the Revolutionary earthquake that shook her from end to end, Poussignot, in the very heart of France, appeared to have gone to sleep, and in its state of incredible somnolence to have pursued the peaceful even tenor of the days of the abominable ancient regime. It was so incredible that after the first shock of surprise Chauvinière was

moved to inward laughter : laughter at the sleeper and at the thought of the awakening in store.

The many activities that had engaged his mind during the past month had gradually dimmed the memory of Mademoiselle de Montsorbier, and his chagrin at the manner in which she had victimized him. In a measure as her image faded, so too had faded gradually the savage humour which that memory had inspired and which he had vented upon all and sundry. It was fortunate for Poussignot that, by the time he reached it, he was growing nauseated by bloodshed and weary of the crude pursuit of victims for the knife. The more normal attitude of philosophy upon which he secretly prided himself was gradually returning. His sense of humour was gradually reasserting itself. Poussignot restored it to him completely, although the overawed Committee, now listening to his passionate tirade, was permitted no glimpse of this.

In his deep, vibrant voice, pitched on a note of stinging sarcasm, he trounced that Revolutionary Committee, upbraiding the supineness of its members, threatening them with the doom they had been so reluctant to dispense unto others, unless he beheld them more zealous in the sacred service of Liberty.

Having thoroughly startled them out of their complacency, having delivered them a sermon upon the new gospel of Equality, which he gathered was insufficiently understood in the hills of Poussignot, and having impressed them with the necessity of extirpating all those who were heretical or lukewarm or otherwise a danger to the spread of the glorious new religion, he passed from the general to the particular.

He came already informed, it appeared, of certain things in and about Poussignot, and he now produced a list of persons suspected of the new crime of incivisme, in one or another of its many forms.

"This list I am about to read to you ; and I invite your serious consideration of the persons whose names you are to hear. For you are not to suppose . . ." And here he broke off to swing half round towards the window which overlooked the square where the scarlet guillotine was in course of erection. To indicate it to them, he flung out an arm in a gesture supremely dramatic. "You are not to suppose that engine, that noble glaive of Freedom, that glorious scythe of Equality, under which the heads of the despots and the privileged have been shorn away, is being erected there merely as an idle ornament to your town."

They trembled, never suspecting that this terrible jester

indulged his perverted sense of humour by making a mock for his own secret amusement of the very gospel which he was sent to preach. There were moments when Chauvinière appeared almost to be probing the ignoble depths to which men may be reduced by terror. More than once had he startled his brethren in the Convention itself by solemn fulminations in which it was almost impossible not to suspect sarcasm, yet of which none would have dared to voice that suspicion. One of these moments was upon him now. Inwardly his warped soul was writhing with gleeful laughter at the psychological humours of the situation he created by the images he evoked.

"I must not be understood to say that such an engine would be an idle ornament in any town, even if a virtuous republicanism, too general to be hoped, should compel it to stand idle. For, ask yourselves, my friends, my brothers, what statue of ignoble king, of wretched tyrant, or vile servant of despotism, what image of snivelling saint or mouldering so-called martyr, could ever compare with that glorious symbol of Man's Emancipation, of Man's Deliverance from the fetters that were placed by kings and priests upon his very soul. There it rises, my brothers, in its awful dignity, the emblem of the Triumph of Reason. And what more glorious emblem could any city desire to raise? That scaffold, my brethren, is a sacred altar, upon which it is your holy duty to offer up the impure blood of aristocrats to the greater honour and glory of the Republic, One and Indivisible!"

Under his fiery eyes they huddled together like a flock of terrified sheep. He observed them calmly.

"You are silent, my friends. I understand. You share my own deep emotion. It leaves you speechless in your great thankfulness. That is very well. It is a sign to me that you will not falter in the performance of the exalted duties of the office to which you have had the honour to be elected by the voice of the people, which is the voice of the gods." He raised the list which his left hand had held throughout the exordium, and his tone sank quietly from its lofty note of exaltation. "Let us come now to practical, to precise considerations. Let me read you these names and the crimes of which their bearers are suspected."

There were men on his list whom he charged with being friendly with despots, others with being so closely related to émigrés that their own civisme must be in doubt until thoroughly tested; others whom he understood to be in league with reactionaries in other parts of France; others who were thought to be in correspondence with the enemies of France beyond her

frontiers ; and there were others he named as ripe for Revolutionary justice on the score of birth alone.

It was upon naming the third of these last—one Raoul Amédée Corbigny de Corbal—that he received his first check. “Of what is he accused, that one ?”

The question came abruptly from Doucier, the horse-leech, a man prominent in the local Jacobin Society, and president of the Revolutionary Committee ; a passionate but entirely academic republican, who was honest, fearless and formidable in debate, a man who might, had he so chosen, have represented his own section of the Nivernais in the National Convention. ‘He was the first, as might have been expected, to throw off the spell of terror which Chauvinière had imposed upon the Committee, and to shake himself free of the net of words in which the representative had caught and held them.

The emissary of the Convention was aghast at the audacious interruption. He answered it impatiently : “He is accused of incivisme.”

“But in what form ?” Doucier insisted.

“Form ?” Chauvinière frowned upon him. The question was inconvenient. He shrugged. “In the form of harbouring counter-Revolutionary sentiments.” It was the best that he could do, and it should suffice.

Doucier, however, proved of a disconcerting appetite for detail. He gathered courage as he went and in a measure as he perceived that his questions discomposed the great man from Paris.

“What expression is it alleged that the Citizen Corbal has given to these sentiments ?”

“Expression !” Chauvinière’s rich voice was almost shrill. “Name of God ! Do you take the risk of defending him ?”

“When I hear precisely of what he is accused, I may consider the necessity.”

“But I’ve told you already. . . . Name of a name !”

“Not precisely, citizen-representative. Not precisely. And the Committee of Poussignot demands precise accusations ; not vague charges which of its own knowledge it perceives to be unfounded.”

An approving growl from the assembly informed Chauvinière that, infected by the example of their president, the members of the committee had so far recovered from the spell of his oratory as to be in a state of mutiny.

“Do you say that I lie ?” he asked them icily.

“Oh ! But, citizen-representative ! Only that you may

have been misinformed. Unable to compile your list from personal knowledge, we realize that you must have received assistance and advice. We realize also, when we find in your list the name of one who is generally esteemed, who is known to all for a true republican at heart . . .”

Chauvinière interrupted violently. “A true republican at heart! What next? What cant do you dare to offer me? You had better look to your own heads, my friends, if you have learnt your duties no better than to see a true republican in a pestilential *ci-devant* aristocrat.”

But Doucier was too well informed to accept this as conclusive.

“The two are not inconsistent. You could say the same of the Marquis de Mirabeau, without whom there might have been no revolution. If you will suffer us to guide you in matters of local knowledge, citizen, you will accept our assurance that you have been not only misled, but deliberately misled, by counsellors whose aims are perhaps reactionary. I assure you, citizen, that the gravest consequences might follow upon an unsubstantiated attack upon Corbigny de Corbal. In Poussignot all the world knows the stalwart and practical republicanism of his principles; all the world knows the unpretentious simplicity of his existence, and all the world loves him. That is not a man to be lightly accused. For your own sake, citizen-representative, and for ours, you would do well to be fully armed with particulars of Corbal’s incivism before you demand of us his arrest and trial.”

If the argument did not suffice to turn Chauvinière from his purpose, at least it sufficed to make him temporize.

He announced that he would pay a visit to Corbal, and form at first hand an opinion of the real sentiments of the *ci-devant* Vicomte.

Thereupon he proceeded with his list, which for the rest was mainly concerned with priests who had declined to take the constitutional oath, with others who, having taken it, yet refused or neglected to adopt the constitutional forms of worship, and with others still who, whilst conforming to all prescriptions, yet rendered themselves suspect of insincerity by their persistent celibacy. And when Doucier ventured the opinion that this was too slender a ground for suspicion, he launched Chauvinière upon one of his sinister excursions in comic philosophy.

“Celibacy,” the representative announced, “is an affront to Nature, and who affronts Nature affronts republicanism, which is based on Nature’s laws.”

And upon that, catching fire from his own sententiousness, he reverted to his earlier truculence and invective. He charged

them with lukewarmness where the interests of the Nation were concerned, and warned them not to throw obstacles in the path of his sacred duty, which was to uproot from the holy soil of Republican France the last seed of incivisme which sapped the nourishment required by the noble tree of Liberty, planted by the hand of Reason and fertilized by the blood of patriots. He closed upon a rhetorical exhortation, much in the same manner, that they should not compel him to report to the Executive in Paris that he found the Revolutionary Committee of Poussignot supine, lethargic, and tainted with reactionary sentiments.

On that, perceiving that by his manner and perfervid oratory he had reconquered much of the ground momentarily lost, he abruptly and dramatically withdrew.

Of the truth of their warning about Corbigny de Corbal, of the esteem and affection in which the man was held, he sought and presently found abundant confirmation in the town. This irritated him, unreasonably perhaps. That such a thing could be at such a time showed him how profound was the somnolence of Poussignot, how deep a sense of complacency this little township of the Nivernais permitted itself. All his life Chauvinière had detested complacency. Taking, like an intelligent man, no satisfaction in himself, he loathed the spectacle of self-satisfaction in others, and sought to smash it wherever he met it. He would smash it here in Poussignot in its most confident expression, namely, in the *ci-devant* Vicomte de Corbal. If civisme, as then understood, was so wide a thing that Corbal could sit comfortable and secure within it, then it remained for Chauvinière to discover how to narrow civisme down to Corbal's exclusion. But because he did not wish to set counter-Revolutionary fires alight under his feet, he went about the business with prudence. And he began his study of the problem by paying a visit to Corbal.

CHAPTER VI

THE Château de Corbal was a solid, unpretentious mansion, perched amid vineyards half-way up the hill above the town,

standing four-square, grey and a little dilapidated, flanked by round towers under red extinguisher roofs.

Within doors, the citizen-representative found the same solid unpretentiousness, stressed by faded decorations, which should long since have been renewed, and shabby furnishings, much of which should long since have been burned. That this unpretentiousness extended to Corbal's mode of life was evident when Chauvinière, conducted to the vast stone kitchen, found him there at table with the persons of his household, whom he simply described as his "family". They consisted of his elderly steward, Fougereot, the latter's wife, and their two stalwart sons and a plump comely young woman euphionously named Filomène, who was responsible for the domestic comforts of the impoverished nobleman. Corbal himself, a man of thirty, fitted into his environment as if expressly designed for it. In dress he was almost a peasant, in dignity and in general bearing a gentleman, whilst in speech and in countenance, with his lofty brow and sombre wistful eyes, he suggested the scholar and the poet.

Born to an impoverished estate, he had accommodated himself without idle repining. He had never been to Court, or served his King in any capacity; but from early adolescence he had devoted himself to the cultivation of his three or four hundred acres, directing and in time of need even personally assisting in sowing and reaping, in crushing his own wine and oil and in threshing his own corn like the humblest métayer.

When the monarchy fell with the leaves in the autumn of '92, it was said in his reproach by men of his class that he was of those who had done nothing to uphold it, which was quite true. For when feudalism lay agonizing and a party of neighbouring noblemen came to summon him to his duty as they conceived it, to exhort him to rally to his King, Monsieur Corbigny de Corbal had epitomized his political faith in his reply:

"Messieurs, the King is in no danger unless it be that which you may create for him. By resisting a nation's just demands, you rush upon destruction. By identifying the throne with your resistance, you will destroy the throne with yourselves."

These words, being widely reported, increased the respect and affection in which he was held in the countryside. It was not for nothing that Nature had given him those eyes, rendered wistful by what they found in the heart of things, to which their glances penetrated.

He rose now to receive his visitor, with a dignified deference in which there was no trace of that uneasiness discernible in the members of his household. He was of a good height and finely

made, and his self-command and courtliness were of the kind that compel courtesy in return from all save the hopelessly boorish. Chauvinière was not of these, and therefore he came, a little to his own astonishment, under the spell of the *ci-devant's* ingratiating personality.

"You take me by surprise, citizen," Corbal apologized. "It is not so unceremoniously that I should wish to receive a representative of the government."

"I represent a government, citizen, that dispenses with ceremony," Chauvinière replied, but with a good deal less than his usual haughty sententiousness.

"No government should ever quite do that." Corbal's singularly sweet smile disarmed any resentment which his disagreement might provoke. "Governments are set up to govern; to govern successfully they must inspire respect, and ceremony is the natural expression of respect. Men are not humbled by deference to those things which in themselves command it. On the contrary, they are dignified."

Chauvinière raised his brows despite himself. Was the *ci-devant*, he wondered, permitting himself some of that covert ironic humour in which the representative dealt so freely and with such secret relish?

"A philosopher!" he said, and was not quite innocent of a sneer.

"That is too big a word to describe me, citizen. I have lived long alone; and so I have studied a good deal, to combat loneliness. But I keep you standing. Will you not join our board?" He placed a chair. "You will find us of a republican simplicity."

"That is as it should be," said Chauvinière, who detested republican simplicity, and daily thanked God for a revolution which had brought the succulent things of life within his easy reach. He sat down. He was served by *Filomène* with bread and ham, both of which he found of an excellent quality, whilst Corbal himself poured for him a wine which left little to be desired. Not so impossibly republican, after all, this simple fare.

Corbal resumed his seat. "I am honoured, citizen-representative, my poor house is honoured, by the visit of so illustrious a member of the Convention."

Again a suspicion that he was being mocked crossed Chauvinière's mind. His piercing eyes were upon the *ci-devant*. "And you are not at all inquisitive as to its occasion?"

Corbal smiled, completely at ease. "You are my guest, citizen. It is not for me to pester you with questions. In your

own good time you shall tell me in what I may have the honour of serving you."

"You are of a gratifying patience," Chauvinière commended him, and gave his attention to the ham.

Thereafter Corbal and his odd guest chatted desultorily of this and that, whilst the others sat listening in uneasy silence. At length, the meal being ended, Chauvinière sat back, flung one buck-skinned leg over the arm of his chair and tucked his long hand under the tricolour sash of office that girdled him : a man taking his ease familiarly.

"You are very snug here at Corbal, citizen. I wonder that you have never brought a mistress to it."

It was an idle sentence, uttered to break fresh conversational ground. Filomène was standing behind Corbal's chair at the moment, squarely facing Chauvinière. The sudden flicker of her eyelids, the little spasm of pain that rippled across her plump, comely face, to be instantly suppressed, did not escape the watchful eye of the representative, and may have inspired the impish notion of how this elusive *ci-devant* might well be hobbled.

Monsieur Corbigny de Corbal laughed ; but it was a laugh in which Chauvinière caught more wistfulness than mirth.

"What would you ? I have waited perhaps too long. In earlier life I wooed the land too assiduously. To-day . . ." He shrugged. "To-day it would be not easy perhaps to find . . ." He checked abruptly, as one checks on the brink of an indiscretion.

But the indiscretion was committed ; Chauvinière had no difficulty in completing the *ci-devant's* sentence. He had meant to say that it was not easy to find a woman of his own class in a France which had been purged of aristocrats.

"To find what, citizen ?" he coaxed.

"Oh, but nothing, citizen." Corbal was faintly embarrassed. "It does not matter. And it would be easy to discover a more interesting topic of conversation than myself."

"You are mistaken in both opinions. It matters very much. And it is precisely to talk of yourself that I am here."

"You desire to flatter me, citizen ?"

Chauvinière's last doubt was now removed that the fellow had the audacity secretly to laugh at him. But he let it pass. He had thought of something else. The sentence with which he had rebuked the Revolutionary Committee of Poussignon suddenly recurred to him, and he served it up to his host.

"Celibacy is an affront to Nature ; and who affronts Nature

is no good republican, since republicanism is based on Nature's laws. That is why I say that it matters very much."

They did not take him seriously. Old Fougereot led the laugh in which he was followed by his sons. Even Corbal smiled, whilst Fougereot's wife shyly asked the representative if he were married himself.

"I am not. But in my case there are reasons. . . ." He stressed his words significantly, desiring them to understand that he was quite serious. But they laughed more heartily than ever.

"Oh, but the reasons, then?" the apple-faced woman demanded in raillery.

"The reasons?" He glared at her. "I am wedded to my duties. They leave no room for softer ties."

They began to realize that he was not jesting, and Corbal made haste to change the subject. If Chauvinière suffered him to have his way in this, it was because he required time in which to consider the impishly wicked notion that had invaded his mind.

He was still considering it when, having concluded a visit that in other times must have appeared oddly lacking in purpose, he took his way slowly down the hill to Poussignot; and he smiled a tight-lipped smile of wicked satisfaction in a notion worthy of a psychologist and humorous philosopher such as himself.

"Celibacy is an affront to Nature." That was the new gospel he was to preach, and if he knew at all the force of an idea, no matter how crack-brained, in Revolutionary France—especially an idea propounded by one in authority—there could be no doubt of its success.

The immediate sequel proved him correct. That novel mission of his he inaugurated upon the morrow. From the rostrum of the Jacobin Society of Poussignot—a society founded by a handful of hot-heads, but very languidly conducted since—to the multitude assembled there by an invitation they were forced to regard as a command, he propounded his gospel with the frenzied rhetoric and specious cant with which he had learnt to sway the passions and rouse the emotions of unintelligent, unreasoning mobs.

France was being depopulated by the events. That was his exordium. The evil brood of aristocracy, which the saviours of France had destroyed and were still destroying, must be replaced by a race of free men, born in an enlightened age, to make this France—this noble, emancipated France of Liberty—great and

glorious among the nations of the earth. Replaced, too, must be those splendid patriots who were giving their lives so freely on the frontiers in the defence of their motherland from the invasion of the odious hirelings of despotism. To neglect this was to neglect the most sacred duty that the Nation had the right to claim from her children. It was to expose the Republic, through depopulation, to ultimate destruction.

All this, tricked out in perfervid imagery, in phrases the more sonorous because hollow, gradually stirred his tatterdemalion audience to enthusiastic acclamation.

Having rendered them malleable, he hammered them now with that master-phrase of his :

“Celibacy is an affront to Nature !”

Upon this theme he enlarged, expounding its moral as well as its civic and national aspects, until, at last, perceiving that he had completely taken his audience in the snare of his cant, he boldly demanded of them as a proof of patriotism and sincerity that any man who having reached the age of twenty-five remained unmarried should be declared outside the law.

Thereafter he departed in great dignity, to the acclamations of a multitude intoxicated by his verbiage.

As none knew better than Chauvinière, who made intellectual toys for himself out of these things, such was the crack-brained state of the popular mind that the more extravagant a doctrine, the more assured it was of general acceptance. Fear, moreover, now went hand in hand with imbecility. The guillotine began to function at last in Poussignot, and several recalcitrant priestly heads, besides some others, were shorn away. It became clear that the Citizen-Representative Chauvinière was not a man with whom it would be safe to trifle. In his wake the Terror had penetrated at last to this peaceful township of the Nivernais. And in a feverish haste to give proof of patriotism there was headlong rushing into matrimony in Poussignot during the days that followed. As Chauvinière knew from his experience of mob-psychology, there was no need for him to push the matter beyond his address at the Jacobins. His crazy gospel was preached for him at street corners by unwashed orators who a month ago would not have dared to lift their heads in Poussignot.

Within ten days the movement had reached such a pitch that it was formally proposed and unanimously agreed at the Society of Jacobins that, as the citizen-representative had propounded, for a man of twenty-five to remain unmarried in the face of the country's needs was to give proof of incivisme ; to

be punished as incivisme was punished by declaring him outside the law and sending him to the guillotine.

The Society of Jacobins placed its resolution in the form of an instruction before the Revolutionary Committee. But before an instruction so eccentric, the Revolutionary Committee paused in doubt, and sent for the citizen-representative to give them guidance.

"What the people will, the gods will," declared Chauvinière. "If this matter has been carried further than you would counsel or desire, yet it is not for you, the humble instruments of the People's majesty, to withstand the People's sovereign will."

His superbly oracular tone and manner overawed them. Gazing upon him and listening to him, they realized that there was no god but the Goddess of Reason, and that Chauvinière was her prophet. There was no debate. And thus in the Commune of Poussignot that amazing resolution of the Jacobins was raised to the equivalent of a law. The huissiers of the Tribunal began upon the morrow to go forth in quest of the unmarried, to drag them before the bar, where each was given the option of finding a wife within three days, or else submitting to conviction of incivisme, with death to follow.

The intransigent were few in number, and they paid the penalty.

And now, at last, the ground was sufficiently prepared for an attack upon the hitherto unassailable *ci-devant* Vicomte de Corbal, and the gratification of the citizen-representative's monstrous sense of humour. A definite accusation of incivisme, hitherto almost impossible, was now rendered easy.

The accusation was laid, and M. Corbigny de Corbal was hailed before the bar of the Tribunal to receive the usual admonition.

To do honour to the court and the occasion, practising that ceremony in which he believed, he had dressed himself with unusual care, in garments stored up for ceremonious occasions: a black coat with silver buttons, silk breeches and stockings and buckled shoes. His brown hair was gathered up and neatly tied in a black silk ribbon.

Very dignified and self-contained, he stood in the crowded chamber of justice to hear himself admonished. When it was done he bowed gravely to the members of the Tribunal and he would have withdrawn without uttering a word, if Chauvinière had not intervened to add something of his own to the President's formal speech.

"The Citizen *ci-devant* Vicomte de Corbal," said he, in the

soft accents of an advocate for the defence, "belongs by birth to a class which the Republic has abolished. Himself he has gone unscathed because of the republican spirit by which he is believed to be inspired because of the sentiments of Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity, by the application of which he has rendered himself esteemed. But the time is at hand when the mere appearance of republicanism may not suffice to efface the stigma of aristocratic birth, and he should perceive that he is now provided with an opportunity of placing his republicanism beyond all possibility of future question."

Chauvinière paused deliberately. An utter stillness reigned in that crowded chamber. He considered the impassive countenance of Monsieur de Corbal and anticipated with secret amusement the ruffling of that impassivity. He resumed :

"Acquainted as I am with his household, in which I have had the honour to be entertained, I am fortunately in a position to advise him, to point out to him that he need not be embarrassed by any difficulties of making choice, since a bride lies ready to his hand. I permit myself this indication because so often we overlook that which stands nearest, and I would not have the *ci-devant* Vicomte suffer from any such oversight. A girl of the people who is among those who serve him should prove domestically a very suitable wife. Therefore this court counsels him not only to marry, but to marry *Filomène Paulard*, thus not only fulfilling the requirements of your new enactment, but also affording an abiding proof of his acceptance of the religion of equality—a religion in which France will tolerate no heretics."

The riff-raff largely composing the audience hailed the proposal uproariously as worthy of Solomon. When that uproar died down, Monsieur de Corbal at last spoke. A scarlet flush had overspread his long and rather melancholy countenance. But his voice remained calm and steady.

"You know . . ." He half turned, so as to include the entire assembly. "You all know my habits of life and of thought, and the simple creed by which I have governed my existence. I believe in communism, and I have given proofs of that belief. The Nation is above the individual, and I recognize the Nation's right to demand of me my property and, at need, my life. But I do not recognize the Nation's right to demand of me my soul. . . ."

Chauvinière impatiently interrupted him. "We have abolished all that !"

But Corbal went on as if the interruption had not been :

"Nor do I recognize the Nation's voice in this demand. With submission, citizen-judges, you were placed here to administer the existing laws and not to create new ones. The making of laws is the sole prerogative of the National Convention, and any man or group of men infringing that prerogative and arrogating to themselves any such legislative right are themselves guilty of an incivisme for which they may be indicted."

Chauvinière admired the shrewdness and subtlety of this counter-attack, and was thankful that it was made before men of too low an order of intelligence to appreciate it. A growl of anger and mockery was all it drew from the assembly, and when that subsided the president spoke without emotion :

"You have three days for consideration, Citizen Corbal."

Corbal advanced a step, betrayed out of his imperturbability. The sudden perception that he stood before a wall of unreason, against which intelligent argument must shatter itself in vain, drove him to momentary madness. His eyes blazed in a face that passion turned from red to white.

"Three seconds would be too much, citizen-president, for consideration ; three centuries not enough to alter my resolve to reject this infamy."

And whilst the crowd surged snarling and growling, the president, impassive as doom, insisted : "Nevertheless, you have three days."

Tardily Corbal commanded himself. He reflected that further opposition now might deprive him of even those three days, which he would more than require so that he might set his house in order. He resumed his habitual dignified calm, bowed once more to the Court, and took his departure.

"You see now," said Chauvinière quietly to the president, "what it is worth, this republicanism of the *ci-devant* Vicomte. A superficial veneer underneath which we have ever the harsh, arrogant spirit of the aristocrat, a man, in his own estimation, of a different clay from that out of which the people are fashioned. He burned with shame at the thought of debasing himself in an alliance with a peasant girl. You saw that. Is that republicanism ?"

And Doucier, a little sadly, bowed his head. "You are right, citizen-representative," he sighed. "It required your wit to devise a test that should reveal the man's true nature. We have been deceived in him."

Chauvinière stood up, lean and wiry, put on his plumed hat, and adjusted his cravat. "He has his choice between *Filomène* and the National Widow. Let us hope that he will prefer the

little pullet, and that she will yet redeem him into a good republican."

Doucier laughed. He thought the citizen-representative amusing sometimes. The citizen-representative knew that he was amusing always, but that it was not given to everyone to have the wit to discern it.

CHAPTER VII

AT the leisurely pace of a man who meditates, M. de Corbal took his way home up the hill through the April dusk. He did not relish the thought of dying. Even less, however, did he relish the thought of the horrible *mésalliance* by which he might save his life, which shows that Chauvinière was right and that M. de Corbal's republican sentiments were not of the proper depth. The notion of supplying future Corbals with such an ancestress as Filomène was entirely repulsive to him, however much he may have esteemed Filomène in her proper place. Aristocratic sentiments, after all, die hard.

He reflected that he was confronted with a choice of evils, and he was philosopher enough to know that in such a case he must accept the less. The futility of flight was too apparent. He would be hunted down, and, at a time when it was impossible to move openly in the country without papers, he would soon be overtaken and brought back in ignominy. Let him at least preserve his self-respect. Reluctant though he might be to die, life, after all, was not so delectable in these days, and the Hereafter, if the priests were right, should not be without interest.

He mounted a stile over a wall bordering one of his meadows, and as he leapt lightly down upon the turf, he was suddenly aware of a figure crouching there in the gloom. A moment he stood at gaze, then called out, challenging, whereupon the figure came upright, detached itself from the wall, and was off at speed across the narrow strip of meadowland towards the woods.

Here, thought M. de Corbal, was an eccentricity of behaviour that called for investigation. He was swift of foot, and he was upon the fugitive before the latter had covered half the distance to his goal. He clutched the shoulder of a stripling, clad in the blouse, loose pantaloons and wooden shoes of a peasant.

"A word with you, my friend. You are too fleet for honesty, to say nothing of your skulking behind a wall."

"Let me go," snarled a boyish voice. "I have done you no harm." The figure writhed in his grasp. "Don't dare to detain me!"

"Dare!" Corbal laughed. "Here's fury!"

There was more fury than the Vicomte reckoned. Something bright gleamed suddenly in the boy's hand. On the instant Corbal had him in a wrestler's grip which pinned his arms helplessly to his sides. He hugged the murderous rascal close, intending to throw him. Instead, as if contact with that young body had burnt him, he thrust it sharply from him, and stepped back.

"Name of God!" he ejaculated.

The supposed stripling stood before him, breathing hard with head a little bowed, making no further attempt to escape.

"Who are you? What are you? And why are you dressed as a man? Answer me. I will not hurt you."

The sudden gentleness of his voice, more, its high-bred inflexion, wrought a change in the other's attitude. He threw back his head, showing a face that gleamed white and ghostly in the half-light.

"Who are you? What is your name?" came the counter-questions, in a voice and delivered on a note which left Corbal little doubt of the masquerader's quality.

"Until lately I was known as the Vicomte Corbigny de Corbal. Since then I have enjoyed a certain peace as a *ci-devant*. At the moment I scarcely know how to describe myself. But this land is still mine, and that house up yonder, in which I am prepared to afford you shelter if you will deal frankly with me."

"You are a gentleman!"

"You may call me that, I hope."

"A gentleman at large in France!" Almost she seemed to laugh. "But it is a bewildering encounter."

"Mutually bewildering," said he. "I was not, myself, expecting to meet a lady."

He heard the sharp intake of her breath. "How do you know that?"

"How? I have my intuitions. They are not to be deceived

by rude garments and eccentric manners. I am at your service, madame—or, is it mademoiselle ?”

She hesitated long before passionately answering him : “Oh, if you are a trickster, play your vile trick. It’s all one to me. I am sick and weary. I should welcome even such rest as the guillotine brings. I am Cléonie de Montsorbier.”

He repeated the name in accents of surprise.

“You are incredulous. You have heard of us in prison in Paris. We are a Nivernais family, and there should be interest in us hereabouts. You have heard, perhaps, that monsieur my father and madame my mother have already perished on the scaffold. You may even have heard that I was removed to a house of lunatics, but not that I was removed thence by a revolutionary gentleman who desired to befriend me, because possibly that is not yet known even in Paris. It’s a long story, M. le Vicomte.”

“Tell it me as we walk,” said he, and taking her by the arm, he turned her about to face the distant house, whose windows glowed ruddily in the deepening night.

As they went she told him briefly of her pseudo-secretaryship, and of her escape at La Charité from her republican protector, whom she left unnamed. She had hoped to shelter at the Château de Blesson, with her cousins there. But to her dismay on reaching it in the dawn, she had found it closed and shuttered, the family gone. Thence, on a weary horse, she had plodded on to Verrues, ten miles away, where another cousin dwelt. She found Verrues a blackened ruin, and in her exhaustion and despair she sat down before it and gave way to tears.

Thus she was surprised by a group of scared peasants, a half-dozen members of a family moving out to labour in the fields. She staked all upon their being people not yet infected by revolutionary notions, and disclosed herself to them. The disclosure increased their fear. They were folk who still believed in God and the King ; but who kept the belief secret lest it should bring evil days upon them. Nevertheless it was not in their simple hearts to let a gentlewoman suffer. They gave her shelter for some days, until she began to fear the consequences to them of her being discovered there ; also, because to lie in hiding was too temporary a measure to suit her impatient, eager spirit, she procured from them the peasant garments in which she stood, and departed, hoping to make her way on foot across the Nivernais and Burgundy, and thence slip over the frontier into Switzerland. The Nivernais she had almost crossed, for Poussignot was only a few miles distant from the confines

of Burgundy. But the journey had been one of hardships beyond all that she had feared. And this notwithstanding that Fortune had singularly befriended her. She had made a practice of travelling only by night, never venturing upon roads until they were deserted. By day she would sleep hidden in some wood or buried in the straw of a barn or the hay of a stack. Twice she had been discovered, but each time by charitably disposed peasants, who, without suspecting her sex or quality, had given her food and shelter. Commonly she had suffered hunger, and once at least had been driven to steal so that she might still the pangs of it. Once she had lost her way and for two days travelled north instead of east. Nor would she have known of her error, but that in the neighbourhood of Verzy she was taken ill as the result of a drenching endured whilst endeavouring to sleep under a hedge. Here again she owed her salvation to the charity of peasants. A farm lad had found her staggering weakly along in prey to fever, and accepting the risk of yielding to his invitation she had accompanied him to his homestead, and there, since her spent condition left her no choice, she had disclosed to the mother of the household her sex and quality. For ten days she had remained there recovering health and strength, sheltered, befriended, and used with every consideration. Then she had set forth once more upon her perilous journey. That was a week ago, since when her progress had been slow. She had heard of the presence in the Nivernais of the Representative Chauvinière and the consequent rousing there of Revolutionary activity. Therefore she had deemed it more important to move with caution than with speed. She was upon the road by which Corbal was coming from Poussignot when she became aware of his advance. Because it was not yet quite dark, out of an excessive caution, she had slipped over the wall to avoid him, and thus had not only been discovered, but had been discovered in circumstances which naturally aroused his suspicions. It was the one error of judgment of which she had been guilty in her travels.

"Yet fortune has again befriended you," said the Vicomte, moved at once to compassion for her suffering and admiration of her spirit. "Here at Corbal you may take a night's rest in security and comfort."

"Every such night diminishes my chances of ultimate security," he was answered on a sigh. "It is by night that I should be on my travels."

M. de Corbal halted in the porch, and surprised her by a little laugh. "Faith, mademoiselle, almost you set me an example."

"An example?"

"You suggest things. . . ." He broke off. "No, no. I had thought of it. It is not worth while." He pushed wide the door, and the glow of light from within smote them with almost blinding violence.

"Be welcome to Corbal, mademoiselle."

She stepped ahead of him into the spacious and rather shabby stone hall. He paused a moment to close and make fast the door, then turned, and his eyes, now accustomed to the light, beheld her clearly for the first time. Her grey blouse was stained and in places ragged. She had doffed the shabby hat, which looked as if it might have been filched from a scarecrow. She had cut her hair and it hung loose and ragged now about her neck and ears, just as a peasant lad's might hang, but the light smote from its golden sheen an aureole about her little head, so admirably poised, and the finely featured high-bred face gave the lie to the tatterdemalion rest of her.

M. de Corbal gazed upon her, lost in a rapture of wonder such as he had never known. So intent were those sombre dark eyes of his that at last her glance fell away before them, and she shifted a little uncomfortably.

"You were saying, monsieur?" quoth she, perhaps to break the spell. "Something of an example, was it not?"

But still he gazed and gazed, and the natural wistfulness deepened in his countenance. When at last he spoke, it was cryptically, employing the old gladiatorial formula.

"*Moriturus te salutat!*" He bowed a little. "Yet it is good to have seen you first."

She stared at him with closer scrutiny, startled by that well-known Latin phrase.

"What do you say? Who is it that is about to die?"

"Are we not all in that case," he evaded, "all who are of your class and mine? Is not France to us as the arena to the Roman gladiator who hailed Cæsar in those words? But I keep you standing."

The instincts of his blood asserting themselves, he remembered the duties of a host and put aside all other considerations.

"You will require garments, mademoiselle. I will call my housekeeper. Perhaps she may . . ."

"Ah no!" she checked him. "Clean linen if you will. Give it me yourself, or send it to me by a man if you wish. But for the rest, leave me as I am, nor disclose me to be other. The Citizen Chauvinière is a thought too close for any risks."

"You know the Citizen Chauvinière?"

She smiled. It was wonderful, he thought, that she should smile so. Not to alarm him unnecessarily, she evaded his question. "I have heard of his activities."

He nodded. "You are wise, perhaps. Come then, you shall have what you need."

Himself he conducted her to a room above, procured for her the linen she required, and left her, to go and inform and instruct his household touching the presence of a peasant boy whom it pleased him to befriend.

The household, openly loyal and faithful to the Vicomte and secretly faithful to the old order, treated the visitor at table with an equality touched by deference. They had no doubt of her quality, although it is possible that her sex remained unsuspected, so slim was she and so boyish her voice. By her request the Vicomte called her Antoine, which was the name she had worn with Chauvinière.

Deep dejection sat that night upon the little company gathered there to supper in the great kitchen, and Filomène, as she waited upon them, showed eyes that were red from weeping in a face unusually white. They had heard the day's events before the Revolutionary Tribunal and of the doom that now overhung their master. Filomène herself was outraged in her every sensibility by the offensive alternative to death which had been offered the Vicomte whom she served and worshipped.

Corbal alone appeared unmoved, and indifferent to the sword suspended over his head. Indeed, he was far less silent than his wont, and there was even a touch of gaiety, of exaltation, in his bearing. He ministered solicitously to the needs of his guest, from whose face his eyes were removed only when she showed herself too conscious of his glance.

At first Mademoiselle de Montsorbier experienced a sense of discomfort. Those great sombre eyes riveted so ecstatically upon her evoked a memory which of all memories she desired to bury. They reminded her of another pair of eyes that smoulderingly had pondered her across another table, scorching her soul with the insult of their glance. But that sense of parallel was short-lived. The Vicomte's eyes reflected wonder and a sort of ecstasy, but all of homage. They inspired confidence, evoked a responsive kindness, where those other eyes had awakened only fear, and somehow, before the meal was done, before the Fougereots and Filomène had retired, leaving the Vicomte and his guest alone, she had the full measure of this man. She had seen in his bearing towards his people, and their bearing towards him, his fundamental gentleness, his engaging simplicity in

externals, his true nobility of heart and the devotion he was capable of inspiring. The pale, handsome face under its neatly dressed, lustrous brown hair was the face of a loyal, generous man, in whom no woman need hesitate to repose her trust.

He took no advantage of the circumstances to seek to detain her there alone in talk. Himself, soon after the departure of the others, he escorted her to the chamber set apart for her. He set down her candle, requested her commands, and withdrew after wishing her a good rest with an austerity which left nothing to be desired, and without so much as an attempt to kiss her fingertips, which in all the circumstances would have been no more than proper.

CHAPTER VIII

"MADEMOISELLE, remain yet another day with us. The more complete now your rest, the better speed will you make hereafter, so that the time will not be lost."

Thus M. de Corbal to his guest on the following afternoon.

They sat in the library, whither he had earlier conducted her ; an untidy, dusty room, panelled in soiled white on all sides but one, which was packed from floor to ceiling with serried ranks of books. Its furnishings were handsome and as massive as anything produced in the reign of Louis XV, but they wore, like all else in that house, an air of dilapidation. The litter on the spacious writing-table testified at once to studious industry and to negligence.

Mademoiselle de Montsorbier, occupying a window-seat along which was stretched one of her slim, pantalooned legs, demurred at the proposal, expressed the opinion that she had best push on at dusk ; that, in fact, she could not think of subjecting M. le Vicomte to the risk of her discovery under his roof.

At this M. de Corbal laughed with such evident amusement as to pique her a little, for she could not conceive in what she

was ridiculous. But he did not leave her long in conjecture. He paced the chamber as he talked, upright and handsome, looking more like a nobleman and less like other things than usual. Not only had he resumed to-day the ceremonious dress in which yesterday he had attended the Tribunal—the only suit of its kind in his wardrobe—but he had improved upon it. There was a foam of lace at his neck, and ruffles at his wrists to veil the hands which labour in the open had burnt brown, and he had brought out of their neglect a pair of lacquered shoes with paste buckles and red heels, shoes which in those days would have imperilled any man's neck.

He explained his laughter. "Mademoiselle, I am in the enviable position of a man for whom risks have ceased to exist, whom fear can no longer touch. This is Tuesday, and on Thursday next I am to die. That is why I laugh at the notion of danger to me from harbouring you."

She swung her leg from the window-seat, and sat bolt upright, confronting him, her eyes wide.

"Monsieur! How is this possible? You amuse yourself at my expense! How can it be that you, who are free . . ."

"I will explain," he interrupted her, and he did so.

She heard his tale in growing distress and also in growing admiration for his intrepid calm, for the almost humorous outlook with which he viewed his desperate situation. Again she was reminded of another whose outlook was ever humorous, too. But the difference!

"The beast!" she said, when he had done. "The cruel, mocking beast!"

The Vicomte nodded. "That describes him, I think. He is facetiously malign. Well, well! He may have my head. But he will not make me bow it to his humorous will."

Her hands twisting and untwisting between her knees in her agitation of concern, she began to urge him to seek safety in flight.

He cut her short at the very outset.

"I thought of it, of course. But it would be useless, and there's a degradation in failure to which I will not expose myself. I'll be no quarry for these Revolutionary dogs to hunt. If succumb I must, I'll succumb in dignity, as my blood demands. You agree, I hope, that the alternative is unthinkable; that every dead Corbal would shudder in his grave if I were guilty of any baseness to save my useless life?"

She pondered him in silence with an infinite compassion, an infinite tenderness. She was little addicted normally to seek the

feminine relief of tears. Yet now, it was only by an effort of will that she repressed them.

"Is there," she asked after a moment, "no third course possible? Have you thought well, monsieur?"

Perhaps more of her tender concern escaped in her voice than she intended. He halted before her, and his dark solemn eyes considered her. The pallor deepened in his face as if he were suddenly beset by fear, and a deeper wistfulness crept into the lines of it. At last, very slowly, he answered her.

"Yes, I have thought. And a third course does offer. But . . ." He broke off with a little gesture of despair.

"But what, monsieur? Express it freely. It is the way to test a thought."

"You know that, too! How wise you are!" Admiration flashed in his eyes. "This thing, however, is not in need of the test of expression. I hesitate only from the fear of being misunderstood."

She almost smiled as she looked up at him. "To a man in your case can it matter to be misunderstood? And misunderstood by whom? By me? For what does my opinion count in this?"

"For everything," he answered, and set her staring and a little breathless, stirred by something quite indefinable.

He swung away from her abruptly, paced to the book-lined wall, and back again, with bowed head, to come to a halt once more before her.

"I may be suspected of having found here no more than something to supply my need. That is my great fear. Will you believe me, mademoiselle, if I swear that I shall utter no word that is not true? I am a man in his last hours. There may be little good in me; but never in life have I soiled myself by falsehood."

"That is how I should judge you, monsieur. Speak freely, then."

He spoke, but not freely. He faltered and stumbled awkwardly in a manner utterly unusual to him, whose utterance normally was precise and scholarly.

"You will not see, mademoiselle, I beseech you, a lack of . . . of homage in what I am to say. In other circumstances . . . But here time presses. I am a man who has lived much alone. My books and my land have been my only concerns, and my little family almost my only company in years. It is this aloofness from the world which has made possible my survival until now. Many things that make up the life of my kind have

passed me by. I have not missed them, because I have not desired them. No woman . . . I beg you to believe me . . . No woman has ever touched my life. Until now."

Mademoiselle de Montsorbier stiffened. She was very white, and the grey woollen smock shuddered under the heave of her slight breasts. The Vicomte paused there, watching her almost in fear, he who had contemplated death with such tranquillity. He clasped his hands in his nervousness and found them moist.

"I . . . I have read the poets, of course. Yet I do not know how these things come to a man. I know only that love has come to me like a lightning stroke out of heaven. Bear with me, mademoiselle, though I may seem to you outrageous. Doubt what you will, but not my truth and sincerity."

Again he paused. But still she said nothing. Of the two it would have been hard to say which was possessed by the deeper fear.

"When I first saw you there in the light last night, it seemed to me . . . as if my soul leapt from me to embrace your soul. I utter crudities, perhaps. I can express it in no other way. But so spontaneous, so . . . so inevitable was this thing, that it has seemed to me . . . It is not a presumption, mademoiselle. It is an instinct, I think. It has seemed to me that something reciprocal, something mutual must have taken place. It seemed impossible that a man's spirit could . . . experience so much . . . unsupported.

"Mademoiselle, I am ashamed of my poor words. They do not——"

She interrupted him at last. She had risen, and, unbelievable miracle as it seemed to him, her breast was leaning on his own, her face, all white and piteous, was upturned to him.

"Ashamed!" she cried. "Ashamed!" There was a music of tenderness in her voice that dazed his senses. "Your words leave nothing unsaid. Nothing that is not true, at least. Your instincts were at no fault, my dear."

His arms went round her. His voice was the voice of a man in pain.

"Love is the fulfilment of every living thing, and I might have died unfulfilled if you had not come to me at the eleventh hour."

She shuddered. "Oh, my dear!" She lay faint against him.

"Ah! But all that is changed," he cried, to hearten her. "You make life possible. If I had been mistaken, if you had not cared, nothing further would have mattered. I should still have

died the richer, the nobler for what you brought me. But since you care . . . Listen, my dear. The decree of the Revolutionary Tribunal is only that I marry. So that I marry within three days I fulfil the requirement of this grotesque mockery which they call a law. Filomène was proposed to me, because I would make no choice for myself. But Filomène or another, it is all one to them. If you, then, come with me before the Tribunal in peasant dress—that will be safer—as a girl whom I prefer, whom I have chosen for myself . . . We can invent your place of origin. That will not be difficult. If, then . . .”

She broke away from him, and stepped back. “Oh, you don’t know what you are saying!” she cried out in deep distress.

He stood crestfallen, his soaring hopes all checked.

“But if . . . if . . . we love each other?” he faltered. “What difficulty, then? Need the notion of an immediate marriage be so repugnant?”

“It isn’t that. It isn’t that.”

“What then?”

She laughed without mirth. The situation, after all, was not without mirthless humour. “Chauvinière!” she said significantly.

“Chauvinière?” he echoed, misunderstanding her of course.

“What of him, then? Even Chauvinière will be silenced since his demand that I marry will be satisfied. He named Filomène as the only bride at hand. But one woman will do as well as another for him; or if not for him, at least for the Tribunal. So that I obey the decree they can hardly compel me in the matter of my choice. That were too dangerous a precedent.”

“What you say would be true in the case of any woman but myself.”

“But yourself?” He gazed bewildered.

“Because I am the one woman of whom Chauvinière will not permit you to make choice. It is sadly, cruelly ironical, my friend. If you disclose me you merely destroy me with yourself.”

“If I disclose you as Mademoiselle de Montsorbier. But that is not the intention. As a peasant, a girl of the people . . .”

She interrupted him, to make all plain at last.

“That might serve for the others. But not for Chauvinière. Chauvinière was the deputy who smuggled me out of Paris.”

It was a long moment before he completely understood, and understanding brought a curious horror. “It was he? It was he . . .?”

She nodded, her little features twisted in a bitter smile.

He shuddered, and put his hands to his face to shut out the picture which the sight of her now evoked. He stepped back,

and sat down abruptly in a chair. He groaned as he sat there, and at first she misunderstood the source of his pain, imagined it to lie only in the sudden sense of defeat which her disclosure brought him. But his words enlightened her.

"Chauvinière!" he muttered. "That ineffable beast! His foul eyes crawling over your purity and grace." He set his teeth. "That he should have dared! That he should have soiled you by his glance!"

"My dear, is it worth while to think of that? At such a moment?"

"What else is there to think of? What else can matter by comparison? My life!" he laughed. "I would give it freely to have spared you!"

There was a tap at the door. Filomène came in with a scared countenance. "It is the citizen-representative," she announced. "He is here. He asks to see you."

Mademoiselle de Montsorbier shrank back in fear.

Corbal uncovered his face, and came slowly to his feet.

"The citizen-representative?" he questioned dully. "Chauvinière?" Then, abruptly, he cast off his dejection. He squared his shoulders and stood stiff and straight, his face alight with purpose. Mademoiselle de Montsorbier, observing him, instead of distress beheld in him only a preternatural calm. And when presently he spoke again, not only had his voice resumed its natural level tone, but it was faintly changed with a note that was almost derisive.

"The Citizen-Representative Chauvinière, eh? Is he alone?"

"Yes, monsieur. I saw no one else."

The Vicomte nodded. He was smiling. "But how very good, how very condescending of the citizen-representative to honour my house again! And so very opportunely! Almost it is as if he had guessed my need to see him, and desired to spare me the trouble of going in quest of him. Let him wait a moment or two in the hall, Filomène. Detain him there if you can. Then bring him in."

Between surprise and relief at the Vicomte's manner, Filomène departed.

Before she was out of the room, Corbal was at a tall cupboard of polished mulberry that stood against the wall. He found Mademoiselle de Montsorbier at his elbow.

"Will you hide me in there?"

He lost a second in staring at her. Then he smiled and shook his head. "I have no thought to hide you." He took a mahogany case from a shelf in the cupboard.

"But if he finds me here!"

"It is what I desire." He took up a powder-horn and a little linen bag, and closed the door of the cupboard. "The confident, overbearing fool!"

He crossed to his writing-table, and opened the box. It contained a brace of duelling pistols, bedded in its red velvet lining.

CHAPTER IX

FILOMÈNE had her attractions, and a man of so enterprising a nature as the citizen-representative does not allow feminine attractions to go unheeded.

When she returned to him where he waited in the hall, he took her softly rounded chin in his lean hand and considered her approvingly. His words, however, suggested that he did so dispassionately, in a spirit of critical detachment.

"Does he perceive your graces yet, my dear, this fastidious *ci-devant*? Faith, in his place, I should not wait to be bidden twice. I'll make a *ci-devant* Vicomtesse of you yet," he promised, and kissed her by way of sealing the bargain. Detachment, after all, may be pushed too far, and he had a way with him, the Citizen-Representative Chauvinière.

He released her chin and bade her conduct him to the reluctant bridegroom. But Filomène remembered her orders to detain him, and he, himself, had afforded her the pretext. More than this, it was suddenly revealed to her how she might even save the Vicomte, for whom her affection was of the exalted kind that desires to express itself only in service.

"It's not only the bridegroom who is reluctant," said she, her winsome face grown sullen. "You make very free with a poor girl, you gentlemen of the Revolutionary Tribunal. You bid a man marry me without so much as a 'by-your-leave' to me. You take it for granted that I've no mind in the matter. 'Marry Filomène on Thursday, or we guillotine you on Friday.'"

She sniffed her angry scorn. "You think that's all there is to it. And what if Filomène doesn't want the man you order to become her husband?"

Chauvinière was scowling at her. He remembered the soft glances he had seen her bestow upon Corbal, which had first suggested to him the course he had taken. His scowl became a smile of mockery.

"What game do you play with me, my girl?"

"No game, citizen-representative. It's deadly earnest, as you and your Tribunal will discover. I'm not to be handed over like a cow or a sheep, and I don't belong to you to be bestowed by you. Liberty, eh? That's your notion of liberty, is it? Why, the aristocrats would never have dared so much, and you'll not dare it where I am concerned."

"But of course not, if you say so."

"I do say so." Her voice grew shrill. She had wrought herself into a fine mimic passion. "You'd better understand me clearly, and save yourselves the trouble of pushing this imbecile business any further. I do not take a husband at your bidding, and certainly not the Citizen Corbal. I refuse to marry."

Chauvinière was smiling tolerantly upon the vehemence.

"You do?" quoth he.

"Flatly," she announced, not without a flash of exultation, conceiving that thus she had checkmated Chauvinière and saved her beloved Vicomte from the peril that assailed him.

Chauvinière, still smiling, fetched a sigh. "A pity!" he said. "A thousand pities! He will now, if he wishes to live, have to find someone for himself, and I cannot hope that he will find anyone half so agreeable." He sighed again, inwardly relishing the joke. "Now lead me to him, if you please."

Filomène shrank back, aghast to find her weapons so easily shivered. She choked down her tears of rage, eyeing the citizen-representative with a malevolence that but increased his secret mirth.

Then, nothing else being left to do, she conducted him in silence and announced him to the waiting Vicomte. Lithe and active in his long grey coat, tricolour sash, from which a sabre now dangled, and cockaded plumed hat which he did not trouble to remove, Chauvinière swaggered into the library. Within the threshold he halted, irony in every line of him, to survey the Vicomte who, with hands behind him, stood placidly by the empty fireplace. He jerked a thumb after the retreating Filomène.

"A juicy pullet, my friend ; not to be boggled over by a man of taste."

"Perhaps I am not a man of taste—by Revolutionary canons."

"In your own interests I hope you'll prove so. You've offended the child by your reluctance, and she declares that you shall not marry her now if you would. But that's to be overcome by a little persuasive wooing. In your place, I should offer it. You'll find her arms warmer about your neck than the collar of the guillotine. But it's for you to choose between maid and widow."

"You repeat yourself, citizen. Is that the only purpose of your visit ?"

Chauvinière's light eyes drew narrow. Here was one who dealt in a mockery that was deadlier than his own, and just as elusive.

"You misapprehend me." His tone was dry and crisp. "It is the fault of your class to want for understanding. It is the emptiness of aristocrat heads that has brought so many of them to the basket. I am here, my dear *ci-devant*, to exhort you in the fraternal spirit. . . ."

He broke off. A slight movement in the corner on his right drew his glance aside, to discover there a slim lad in peasant blouse and pantaloons.

"Why ? Who's this that . . ." Again he checked, a sudden quickening in his glance. He leaned forward, staring hard ; took a short step, and stopped again. Then an oath of amazement escaped him, and on the heels of that a laugh, loud and full of relish. "Why, here's a meeting !" He swept off his hat. "It becomes necessary to uncover." He bowed. "And how long may you have been at Corbal, my dear secretary ?"

Mademoiselle de Montsorbier came forward a little, miraculously preserving her composure.

"Since last night, citizen," she answered simply, so simply and calmly that it staggered him.

"Oh, since last night, citizen !" he mimicked her. "Since last night, eh ? Name of a name ! I find more at Corbal than I should have dreamed of seeking. Life is full of surprises. But they are seldom as pleasant." He moved to advance towards her.

"Stand where you are !"

It was Corbal who spoke, in a cold, crisp tone that effectively arrested the representative. He stiffened as he confronted the Vicomte across half the room.

"Life is full of surprises, as you say, citizen-representative. This one may not prove quite so pleasant as you are supposing."

There was, in the Vicomte's attitude, in his very calm, something sinister and menacing.

Instantly Chauvinière scented danger, and as instantly would he have forestalled it ; but he was hampered and undone by the mockery in which he dealt so lavishly. His absurd gesture of mock-deference cumbered now his right hand with his doffed hat. Before he could slip that hand into his bosom to pluck thence the pistol which he carried ready for just such emergencies, it was necessary to be rid of the hat. He tucked it swiftly under his left arm. But he got no farther.

His movement was the danger signal to Corbal, and Corbal now covered him with a heavy duelling pistol, steadied upon his left forearm.

"Move a finger, citizen-representative, and I'll dispatch you into Hell."

Chauvinière obeyed, but none too literally. He planted his feet wide, and folded his hands behind him. Then he laughed. He seemed entirely unperturbed, dissembling by an easy bearing the watchfulness of those light eyes of his.

"Surprise upon surprise !" said he. "And this from you, my dear ci-devant ! I was far, indeed, from expecting it of you. Hitherto you have been of so charming and unfailing a courtesy that I should never have thought you capable of such a grossness. Why should you desire to intimidate me ?"

"You misapprehend me. I am not proposing to intimidate you."

"What then ?"

"To kill you."

Again Chauvinière laughed, although he paled a little under his tan.

"But what words ! Come, citizen ; let us be practical. How can my death serve you ? Will it, do you suppose, save you from the obligation of complying with the decree of the Revolutionary Tribunal, or, in the alternative, of leaving your head on the guillotine ? A little reflection, my friend, will show you that it will merely precipitate your doom."

The Vicomte remained unperturbed. "And a little reflection on your side will show you that my life being already forfeit, I can lose nothing by killing you."

"But an act of such puerile and fruitless vindictiveness !" Chauvinière seemed shocked and hurt. "Besides, my friend,

I have two men with me, out there. If you imagine that to shoot me will afford you a chance of escape, you are wrong. The sound of the shot will bring in my men, and that will be the end of you."

"If that were true, which I know it not to be, the intervention would still come too late to prevent the end of you. And Mademoiselle de Montsorbier, at least, will have been made safe. Also you will have expiated the unforgivable presumption which led you to raise your rascal's eyes to her. You son of a dog! You gutter-begotten rogue! Your very glance has been a defilement to her. A slug crawling over the white purity of a lily's petal."

"We become lyrical!" said Chauvinière, but there was a snarl in his voice, for inwardly his arrogant soul was writhing under the lash of the nobleman's contemptuous insults. "I understand, I think. Well, well, you have me at a disadvantage. I must make terms, I suppose."

"There are no terms to be made. It but remains that you give the only payment you can afford."

"You mean that you intend to murder me in cold blood! It is inconceivable. After all, you are a gentleman, not an assassin." There was no mockery now in Chauvinière's voice. It was warmly earnest. "At least, let us exchange shots, here in this room—at ten paces, or any distance that you please elsewhere. You cannot do less than that."

Monsieur de Corbal resumed his urbanity. "I am desolated to refuse you even that. If it were a question only of myself, of my own life and liberty, I would accede gladly. Indeed, I doubt if I should be at even so much trouble to preserve them. But there is Mademoiselle de Montsorbier. I cannot allow either her fate or the punishment of the insult your attentions have put upon her to lie at the mercy of luck or marksmanship."

Chauvinière's face had turned grey. "I am to be murdered, then?"

"Not murdered. Executed."

"A fine distinction!"

"You have dealt a little freely yourself in fine distinctions where the anguish of others was concerned. It is just that a man should sometimes drink as he has poured." The Vicomte's cold sternness left little doubt of the measure of his resolve. Without moving his eyes from Chauvinière, he spoke to Mademoiselle de Montsorbier. "Mademoiselle, may I beg you to withdraw?"

"My God!" broke in a groan from the representative's blood-

less lips, his arrogant spirit now subdued entirely. Only the Vicomte's fixed stare and the conviction that his least movement must hasten the approaching doom prevented him from taking the chance of reaching for that pistol in his bosom. Though fear might have him now in an icy grip, yet his wits retained their clarity. To the last second he would wait and watch for his opportunity. Therefore was he still careful to do nothing to precipitate an end that might yet be averted.

"If you please, mademoiselle!" the Vicomte repeated almost peremptorily, for mademoiselle had made no movement to obey him.

She moved at last, but not to depart.

"A moment please," she said. She strove with her agitation. "Let us be practical, as the citizen-representative himself began by suggesting."

Touched though she might be by the terrible intransigent demands of the Vicomte's devotion, she realized the futility of sacrificing a chance of escape and safety, which she dimly perceived, to the exploitation of a romantic vindictiveness. She saw more clearly and farther than the Vicomte. She had less resentment to blind her. To be desired by a man, however unworthy, can never be quite so unpardonable an offence in the eyes of a woman as in those of her accepted lover. Therefore her thirst for Chauvinière's blood was less fierce than the Vicomte's. It might go unslaked so that his life should serve them better than his death.

Calmly now she expounded her proposals.

"The citizen-representative spoke just now of making terms. Let him write three lines, informing the Revolutionary Tribunal of Poussignot that he has found it necessary suddenly to pay a visit to Nevers which will keep him absent until to-morrow. After that, let him consent to be confined here for twenty-four hours, so as to give us that measure of start in our escape. Those are the terms on which you will no doubt agree, Vicomte, to spare his life."

The Vicomte's face darkened. "I should prefer . . ."

She interrupted him, her tone persuasively insistent. "I have told you, my friend, what I desire. It is, believe me, better, safer so; nor do I want you to soil your hands unnecessarily."

If he yielded grudgingly, at least he wasted no words.

"It is for you to command. Be it so. You have heard Mademoiselle's proposal, citizen. What do you say?"

Chauvinière breathed more freely. The tide of his courage flowed again, bringing with it at once a resumption of his normal

manner. If he accepted this chance of life, he certainly should not be suspected of snatching at it.

He took now his time in answering, let it be seen that he pondered the proposal in dignified calm.

"As I have already said, you have me at a disadvantage." He shrugged. "I must therefore capitulate on the terms you offer. But I'll first require some guarantee that when I have fulfilled my part, you will not fail to perform yours."

"My word is your guarantee," said Corbal curtly.

Chauvinière pursed his lips. "A little meagre," he deprecated.

"It has never yet been so accounted. And only a fellow of your own base origin, ignorant of the ways of men of honour, could suppose it."

Chauvinière looked at him, and sneered. "It is evidently among the ways of men of honour to insult the man at whose head they hold a pistol. That is noble. That inspires confidence. That assures one that the word of such a man is a sufficient guarantee of anything!" He was bitterly derisive. "But I must take my chance of your keeping faith. I see that plainly. Tell me this at least: when you have departed, and the twenty-four hours shall have come to an end, who is to restore me to liberty?"

"I shall arrange for that."

"You'll forgive my importunity in desiring to know something of those arrangements before I surrender completely to your wishes. You'll realize my reluctance to be left to starve in the cellar into which you'll lock me, if you should forget, or find it difficult, to take the necessary steps to procure my release."

It was mademoiselle who answered him. "At this hour tomorrow the key of your prison shall be delivered to the President of the Revolutionary Committee together with a note containing the information necessary to procure your enlargement."

He inclined his head. "That will do excellently, of course. But who will carry the key and the note?"

"You may depend upon us to find a messenger, wherever we may be. There is no difficulty in that."

"But messengers are sometimes unreliable. If this one should delay or neglect entirely to discharge his errand?"

"We shall do our best to procure a messenger entirely trustworthy, and we shall assure him of a handsome reward at your hands to quicken his zeal. That is the utmost we can do. The rest is your risk."

He shrugged and spread his hands. "I must accept it, I suppose. You leave me little choice."

"About it, then," Corbal commanded him. "Write your note here. You will find quills, ink and paper."

Chauvinière stepped forward as he was bidden, drew up a chair and sat down at the writing-table, across which the Vicomte faced him with his ever-levelled pistol.

His pen scratched industriously for some moments, but not half so industriously as his nimble rascally wits, seeking for him a way out of this trap, a way of breaking faith and turning the tables on these two who made a mock of him.

At last he signed with a flourish, flung down the pen and rose. He took up the note and thrust it under the eyes of Monsieur de Corbal at close quarters ; at such close quarters that his left hand which held it was not more than three inches from the Vicomte's right with its levelled pistol.

"Read for yourself," he said harshly.

Momentarily Monsieur de Corbal's glance was lowered to read. But in that moment the sheet waved and fell away under his eyes ; and before he realized what was happening, the fingers of the hand which had held it had pounced upon his wrist, and their paralysing grip was bending it aside so that the Vicomte's weapon was now harmlessly deflected.

Corbal saw the representative's right hand slide into the bosom of his broad-lapelled coat for the pistol which he kept there, and heard the representative's mocking voice.

"I take this trick, I think, my dear *ci-devant*. Opportunity never fails the man who knows how to seize it."

And his laughter rang out clear and sharp, to be suddenly lost in the report of a shot which filled the room with its reverberations.

Chauvinière choked on his laugh, loosed his hold of the Vicomte's wrist and reeled backwards, whilst the pistol which he had been in the act of drawing dropped from his nerveless grasp. He brought up with his shoulders to the wall, pressing to his left side a hand which grew red almost at once with the blood oozing between the fingers.

Steadying himself there, his features twisted into a spasmodic grin. He attempted to speak, but broke into a cough, with the acrid taste of powder-smoke in his throat and nostrils. The cough deepened. It became a frantic effort to clear his lungs so that he might breathe, and a foam of blood appeared upon his lips. He writhed yet an instant, his limbs twitched convulsively, and finally he slid down the panelled wall into a quiet heap from which his knees protruded sharply.

It had all happened so quickly that the Vicomte had never

moved from his place beyond the table, nor mademoiselle from the other end of the room, where she stood staring white-faced upon her work, the pistol still smoking in her hand.

It is curious that the first thing calling for comment from Monsieur de Corbal should have been the least important.

"Death caught him with laughter on his lips," he said on a note of horror.

"I seem to remember," said mademoiselle, "that once he predicted something of the kind for himself." Her voice was oddly strained.

The Vicomte pursued his train of thought.

"He might be laughing still, and with good reason, if you had not insisted upon taking the second pistol for your own possible emergencies. I never dreamed that the emergency would be mine. You were only just in time, Cléonie. Already I was looking in the face of death."

"That," she answered unsteadily, "was my only justification." She shuddered, let her pistol fall to the ground at last, covered her face with her hands and fell to sobbing convulsively.

Instantly the Vicomte was at her side, his arms round her slim shoulders, his head bending to hers, his voice soothing and heartening her. Thus he drew her from the room, closing the door upon the thing it contained, and out into the hall, where Filomène with a scared face awaited them.

CHAPTER X

SEATED out there in the chill gloom of the hall, on a high-backed wooden settle ranged against the grey wall, Mademoiselle de Montsorbier presently recovered command of herself.

She looked from Filomène, who, without illusions now on the score of this visitor's sex, knelt at her feet, chafing one of her hands, to M. de Corbal, who leaned over her in a solicitude that made him momentarily oblivious of all else.

"My friend, forgive this weakness, it is not the time to yield

to it. Tears are a luxury for those who are secure." She dried her eyes. "We are in grave peril now, and it will need all our resource to win out of it."

But M. de Corbal smiled confidently. "Your resource has already provided for that, my dear. The note which you made him write to the members of the Tribunal will sufficiently explain his absence, whilst his removal raises the only obstacle to . . . to the nuptials which are required of me, provided that . . . that you . . ."

She interrupted him, raising her eyes to his, a wan smile on her white face. "You may take that for granted now, Raoul."

"Then let us lose no time. Filomène will find you such garments as you need, and we'll present ourselves to the Tribunal at once. Its members are all friendly towards me in themselves. It was only Chauvinière's influence and the fear of him which stiffened them against me in the matter of these Revolutionary nuptials. In Chauvinière's absence they'll be willing enough to let me choose my own bride so that I comply with the decree. Indeed, not Chauvinière himself could have pushed matters so far as to constrain my choice of a wife, so long as I was willing to take one, especially if she were of humble origin as you'll pretend to be. Come, then. We'll invent the origin, together with a name for you, as we go."

"How you run on," she said, and almost laughed for all her heart-sickness and abiding horror of the thing so lately done.

"It is necessary. Time presses. Come."

"Wait! Wait!" she was imperative. "Do not let haste drive us into rashness. Consider first what must follow. Chauvinière's note will satisfy the Tribunal now, no doubt. But for how long? In a day or two there will be questions . . ."

He broke in upon her fears. "You do not know Poussignot. I do. I have lived here all my days. Trust my judgment in this. Chauvinière's presence has been a nightmare upon the place. His absence will bring relief, a reaction to the normal which will steadily grow whilst that absence is protracted. Very soon Poussignot's only concern will be lest Chauvinière should return. Poussignot will do nothing to encourage that, and will rest content so long as it does not occur."

"You are very confident."

"I have cause to be."

He was persuading her. "And the note?" she asked. "How will you convey it to the Tribunal?"

"Oh, I've thought of that, too. The ostler at the inn where Chauvinière lodges is my man Fougereot's nephew, a God-fearing

lad to whom all sansculottes are detestable. Fougereot will convey the note to him, and he will deliver it : a natural enough messenger."

Her face brightened at last. "You've thought of everything," she approved him. "Chauvinière's death, then . . ."

"Is the best thing that could have happened for the world in general and ourselves in particular. And he brought it on himself, overreaching himself in his trickiness. Fetch Fougereot from the fields, Filomène. Meanwhile I'll get the note."

The girl departed on her errand, and the Vicomte returned to the library. Alone with her thoughts, Mademoiselle de Montsorbier fell momentarily to shuddering again, and again covered her face with her hands to shut out the sight of Chauvinière as she had last seen him. Thus M. de Corbal found her on his return. She heard him close the door of the library and turn the key in the lock. Then, seeing her huddled there, he hastened to her side.

"My dear, my dear ! Courage ! Courage !"

"I need it, yes." Her pale lips were twisted into a smile, half grim, half whimsical. "I am not used to killing men."

"If I could have spared you that !" he cried. "But you have no grounds for self-reproach." And he reasoned with her long to banish from her mind the horror by which he perceived her to be beset. At last his fond efforts prevailed.

"Yes, yes. You are right. This is sheer weakness. And it's out of season. You have the note ?" He held it up in silence. "Read it to me. Let us know exactly what he has written."

The daylight was beginning to fade. He strode across to the mullioned window, and with his shoulder turned towards her raised the sheet so as to hold it to the light. In that attitude he remained for a long while immovable and silent, until at last her patience ended.

"Well !" she urged him. "Read it to me."

He turned to her, still in silence, and she saw that his face was of the colour of chalk.

"What is it ?" she cried in immediate alarm.

He uttered a little laugh of bitterness, of hopelessness.

"I seem to remember that the rascal said the trick was his. A trick, indeed. Come here." She crossed to his side at once. "See for yourself what he has written, the bitter jester."

She took the sheet from his hand, and read :

My dear ci-devant—this is to assure you that within the next twenty-four hours two things of interest to you will happen : you

will be guillotined, and the dainty, slippery Montsorbier will at last belong to me. I shall have cause to thank you for the entertainment provided for me here to-day.

She looked up at M. de Corbal in blank dismay. The Vicomte nodded, smiling bitterly. "He counted confidently upon tricking me with it as he did, the resourceful dog ; so confidently that he didn't hesitate to indulge his wicked humour even with my pistol at his head."

"Yes," she said. "He was like that. And his humour was the death of him."

They looked at each other helplessly, almost despairingly, bereft of the staff upon which they had so confidently looked to lean.

They were back, it seemed, in the situation which had been theirs that afternoon before the advent of Chauvinière, save that now they were additionally burdened with the representative's dead body. There could no longer be any question of those Revolutionary nuptials upon which they had been counting. For in the absence of any acceptable explanation for it, Chauvinière's disappearance must very soon give rise to inquiry. At any moment almost that inquiry might begin. Even if he had not announced to any his intention of visiting Corbal, some there might have been who had seen him come that way. He was not a man whose movements went unnoticed. He could not pass anywhere unperceived. The trail, even if weak in places, would presently lead to the Château de Corbal. The Vicomte would be asked questions which he could not answer. To hide the body could not avail him. He would be required to produce the living Chauvinière. And failing that, the conclusion was foregone. It needed no words between them to expound all this. Each saw it clearly.

"There is one thing only now," said the Vicomte. "I must go. I must set out at once before the hunt is up."

She looked at him, her bright face resolute.

"We must go, you mean."

He shook his head. "Do you think I'll link you to a hunted man?"

"You will be hunted for the thing I did."

"What then? The thing you did was done to save me. It was made necessary by my own carelessness. The responsibility for the deed is mine. The intention to kill him in any case was mine. Only an accident, my own stupidity, prevented it."

"All that is not worth discussion," said she. "There are

more important things to consider." And that she was considering them her knit brows bore witness.

"Yes, yes," he agreed. "You must shift for yourself now, my dear. It would not be wise in you to remain. I'll try to think of something for you. All that I can think at the moment—though it breaks my heart to say it—is that in no case must you come with me."

Again she looked at him, and now she was faintly, sadly smiling.

"How far do you think that you will get in your flight through this mad land?"

"That's why ; that's why," he answered passionately. "I know I stand hardly a chance at all."

"Without me you stand none. That is why you need me more than ever. We are to be married. That was agreed between us. Shall I let a husband slip through my fingers without an effort?"

"Can you jest, Cléonie?" His voice was shaken with pain.

"Ah, but I can be serious too," she said, now oddly tender. She set her hands upon his shoulders and looked up into his pale, distressed countenance. "Do you believe in Destiny, my dear?"

"I don't know what I believe."

"Consider then. Do you think it is just blind chance that you and I, who without knowing it have been seeking each other from the beginning of our lives, should have been brought together in this odd manner, at this odd time, in circumstances which left us no leisure for ordinary wooing? My dear, don't you see that it is Destiny which has linked us now? If I had not come when I came, you would certainly have perished. If I had not found you when I did, it is probable that I should have perished too. Perceiving this, can you suppose that our lives are to end here, now that we have met?"

Her earnestness shook him, and partly he succumbed, as men will—especially men in desperate case—to the suggestion that behind all human fortunes there is a guiding Intelligence which may not be thwarted. Nevertheless, for her sake, because of the risk he perceived for her, he still resisted, though more weakly now, her intention to join him in his flight.

"But if we separate," she said with sad conviction, "we separate for ever ; there is no chance for either of us. I feel it. I know it. Together we may win out. If we do not, at least we shall be together to the end, as Destiny intends for us. And it is my strong belief that we are meant for a happier union than

the crazy republican nuptials with which you would have been content."

He looked at her in heavy silence, looked down into those clear, steady, fearless eyes, and surrendered at last to her dauntless spirit. He drew her close and kissed her gently.

"So be it, my dear. I leave myself to you; to you and Destiny."

She flashed him a quick smile, and at once became brisk and practical. She demanded to be made free of his wardrobe that she might find herself male garments better suited to the part she meant to play. Naturally he desired to know what part this was, what plan was in her mind.

Lightly she mocked him. "You thought, of course, that I should be a party to a blind, blundering flight that would land us headlong in destruction. But I am proposing an orderly retreat. I have it here." She tapped her golden head. "The details are yet to be thought out. That while I change my clothes. Ask me no questions now, my friend. Trust me and leave yourself to me, as you said just now you would do."

It was generous of him to thrust aside a momentary vexation at this half-confidence. "Have your way, then, Madame Destiny," he said; "I have made unconditional surrender."

CHAPTER XI

HAVING placed at her disposal the slender resources of his wardrobe, M. de Corbal left her, and went to make his own preparations for immediate departure. He gathered up what store of money he possessed, a little secret hoard of gold which he disposed in a hollow belt next to his skin, and a bundle of assignats, to be spent on their way to the frontier, since they would be useless beyond, should they ever cross it. There were, too, a few family jewels which—since sentiment must yield to necessity—might later, abroad, be converted into money, and lastly some title-deeds and other papers establishing possessions

very insecure at present but to become valuable again should France ever awaken from her republican nightmare. Since to take all was out of the question, it became necessary to select the most important, and this selection occupied some little time.

Almost an hour had elapsed before he descended to the hall, booted and spurred, carrying cloak and valise, for she had told him that they would ride openly as soon as darkness should have fallen. It had fallen now and it was in the light of a cluster of candles that he found her already awaiting him, arrayed in garments which, despite their ridiculous looseness, gave her something of the *petit-maitre* air which she had worn as Chauvinière's secretary. Considering the amazing things that she had done with scissors and needle, her speed in making ready seemed nothing short of miraculous. And there were signs that her preparations had been completed some time ago, and that she had since been engaged with arrangements which really should have been his care. For even as M. de Corbal was descending the stairs, he heard her addressing Fougereot, who at that moment came in from the open.

Her voice rang sharply. "You are just in time, Fougereot. Here is M. le Vicomte. Have you made everything ready?"

"Everything as mademoiselle commanded," the man replied, and so informed M. de Corbal not only that she had disclosed her identity to his people, but also that she had been issuing orders concerned with their departure.

"And your family?"

"Waiting out of doors with Filomène."

"The horses?"

"Saddled and waiting, mademoiselle."

"The scarf and hat?"

"They are there, on that chair, mademoiselle."

M. de Corbal halted beside her at this point in that catechism. She was, he observed, rather pale and a little breathless, but so brisk and determined in manner that wonder grew even as he watched and listened. He was perceiving in her a further display of that spirit which Chauvinière had so much admired.

In riding-boots ridiculously large, but secretly stuffed with hay to make them fit her, she stepped aside to take up the tricolour sash and the plumed and cockaded hat, purloined from Chauvinière, who would no longer need them. She returned to proffer them to the Vicomte.

"These are for you."

He recoiled, almost in horror.

"You must wear them, my friend," she insisted. "It is a

necessity. Henceforth, you are the Citizen-Representative Chauvinière."

"It will need more than this . . ." he was beginning.

"I have more." She tapped her breast. "Trust me a little, my friend. Above all do not let us now delay. Come."

He yielded to her peremptoriness and suffered her to assist him to assume the sash of office, and afterwards to lead him out, Fougereot following with M. de Corbal's valise.

Outside by the horses, visible in the light that streamed through the open door, stood Fougereot's wife and their two big lads and Filomène. Came brief but touching farewells between the seigneur and his shrunken family. The Fougereots, all four, were in tears, not only at parting with their Vicomte, but at what else remained to be done. This and the stifled sobbing of Filomène moved him so profoundly that he could not trust himself to speak. In silence he wrung the hand of each in turn, then got to horse. It was Mademoiselle de Montsorbier who spoke for him now.

"You will care for the land," she told them, "and count it your own until monsieur the Vicomte comes to claim it again."

"God send that may be soon!" said Fougereot, and in a choking voice added something which the Vicomte did not understand. "We'll rebuild the house for you."

"God keep you, M. le Vicomte!" cried Fougereot's wife, and the others repeated it after her.

With that valediction ringing in his ears Corbal, still half-bemused, put spurs to his horse, and presently, by a path that skirted the little town of Poussignot, he was trotting through the dusk with his fair, frail, but very resolute companion, their faces set towards Burgundy.

They breasted a slope to the east of the town, and an hour and a half later paused on the summit to breathe their horses and to look back.

The valley below lay all in darkness. But five miles to westward a flaming beacon split the gloom and drew the eye. It drew more than the eye of M. de Corbal. A moment he gazed, his head craned forward, his breath suspended.

"God in Heaven!" he cried out at last. "That is Corbal. It is on fire." Had he himself been burning at the stake, his voice could hardly have carried more distress.

Mademoiselle, at his elbow, sighed before replying.

"Yes, my dear. It is Corbal. Corbal and all that it contains as a funeral pyre to Chauvinière."

Something in her quiet tone recalled Fougereot's cryptic

phrase : "We will rebuild the house." He swung in the saddle to peer at her through the gloom.

"You knew !" he cried, almost in reproach.

"I ordered it."

"You ordered it ?" Amazement raised his voice. "And they obeyed you ?"

"Only because they perceived the need to do so, for your own safety and for theirs."

"The need ? What need ? And why was I not told ?" He was between anger and complaint.

"You might have demurred, and time might have been lost in persuading you. Perhaps, out of a natural love for the house of your fathers, you might have refused to be persuaded until it was too late. Fougereot perceived that, too. Therefore, he obeyed me."

"But the need for this ?" he repeated.

"The need to destroy all evidence of what took place, not only to ensure against pursuit, but also to make things safe for your people who remain, and who might otherwise be incriminated. Listen, my dear. By now the Fougereots will be in Poussignot with the tale in which I instructed them. They will relate that returning from the fields at dusk they found the Château on fire. That is all they know. Poussignot will surmise a dozen things, amongst them that you have perished in the flames, which they may even suppose—the Fougereots may hint at—that you set alight. They will surmise things, too, on the score of Chauvinière, particularly if it be known to any of them that he went to Corbal this evening. But don't let that trouble you. By dawn we shall be far away."

"You make it clear," he said. "Forgive my dullness." He looked across the valley at the leaping flames, and as he looked his sight grew blurred. "Yes, it was necessary, all things considered. But, oh, my God !"

It was a moment before she answered him, and when she did so she set a hand upon his arm.

"In this world, Raoul, all things worth having must be bought and paid for. That bonfire is the price you pay for life. Is it worth while ?"

Instantly he swung to her, and cast his weakness from him.

"A thousand times if I am not to be cheated yet. If I am to buy life and love."

"You shall not be cheated, my dear. I have promised you both, and I'll not cheat you of either." She withdrew her hand from his arm, and spoke in another, brisker tone. "Let us push

on. Henceforth you are the Representative Chauvinière on a mission to Switzerland, and I am your secretary Antoine."

He sighed, still dubious. "Yes. But if we are called upon to prove it?"

She proffered him a package, wrapped in oiled silk and tied by a ribbon. "You had better carry these," she said. "They are the passports of the Committee of Safety to the Representative Chauvinière and his secretary, commanding all to aid and warning all against hindering them, in the name of the Republic, One and Indivisible. And there are some other papers, also of importance, enjoining obedience upon all civil functionaries. It was prudent of me to have taken the representative's portfolio when I fled from him at La Charité. But I never thought to pass myself off again as his secretary, as I never thought to find a substitute for Chauvinière himself, nor while he lived would this have been easy."

He was silent a long time in sheer wonder of her wit and resource. Then he fetched a sigh that ended in a little laugh.

"I should have known better than to suppose that you merely hoped to strike blindly across the frontier. This makes things easy . . . assured! Oh, it is incredible, as incredible as you are, Cléonie!"

He heard her answering laugh in the dark. "Let us be moving, dear. We are on surer ground, I think, than your republican nuptials would have provided."

He wheeled his horse to follow her.

"The nuptials surely are also in the arrangement," said he.

Again her laughter answered him, but this time very soft and tender. And the nuptials followed, in Lausanne, a week later, when they found themselves among friends.

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HERE is a stream of fresh light upon India, which penetrates into the darkest places of the great problem. It is an inspired work, concerned not only with material considerations, but which carries the reader into the realms of cosmic reality and reveals what has hitherto proved shadowy and mysterious. Though there have been many books on the subject of India which prescribe a cure for its present condition, hitherto no one has attempted such a diagnosis. *Arya* is unique. India is in the front rank of world problems, the cure of its ills more immediate and more important than those of any other, for vital reasons which the author explains. 5s.

Murder!

By Benjamin Bennet in collaboration with

François Pierre Rousseau UP FOR MURDER

A Study of South African Murder Cases

"**A**FRICA," writes Mr. Bennet in his introduction to this thrilling and fascinating book, "is quite different from Europe in her polyglot millions, her vastness, wildness, wealth, development, culture, politics, problems, mystery, unexpectedness—often even in murder. I think I may fairly claim," he continues, "to have 'covered' most of South Africa's outstanding murders and big crime stories during the past half-dozen or so years. I have been commissioned by my papers to 'write-up' murder investigations and trials in different parts of the country. In the Cape Town courts I have fought my way to the Press-box through struggling mobs of expensively furred, sensation-loving white women, who unconcernedly rub shoulders with *fezzed* Malays smelling of garlic, and tattered, offensively filthy kafirs from the city's garbage heaps."

Unusual, of absorbing interest, *Up For Murder* is, of its class, a book of outstanding quality. *Illustrated, 15s.*

Travel & Adventure

By *Attilio Gatti*

BLACK MIST

Author of "Hidden Africa", "Tom Toms in the Night", etc.

COMMANDER GATTI, who, with his previous books, has thrilled so many lovers of adventure, devotes this new book to the many mysterious happenings he has encountered among the Arabs of the North and the natives of Southern and Central Africa.

Only a rare and intimate knowledge of the dark-skinned men of the North and South has made it possible for Commander Gatti to have seen and heard the remarkable stories he relates; to have penetrated somewhat into the "black mist" of the native mind, beyond the boundaries of reason.

Black Mist is a book of profound and unusual interest, which will excite discussion and provoke and thrill the many who will be attracted by its strangeness.

Illustrated, 18s.

Sport

By *Marjorie Pollard*

CRICKET FOR WOMEN

Author of "Hockey for Women", etc.

NO one could more appropriately write this first book about women's cricket than Marjorie Pollard, who has contributed so much to the progress of women's sport.

Miss Pollard has been closely associated with the development of the Women's Cricket Association since its foundation, has played in all the representative matches since 1927, and was a member of the first England Women's Cricket team to be chosen.

This book is, in some cases, pre-elementary in that it endeavours to teach such things as throwing and catching the ball. But all details of the game are dealt with from the woman's point of view and for her needs. There are interesting chapters on the history of women's cricket and many entertaining recollections of the author's own experiences.

Illustrated, 4s. 6d.

A Delicious Volume

By *Cosmo Hamilton*

PEOPLE WORTH
TALKING ABOUT

With Caricatures by Conrado Massaguer

SINCERITY, charm and the feeling that the author is talking about his intimates—these are the keynotes of this collection of sketches. Most of them deal with our contemporaries; the remainder with men whose enduring influence entitles them to the name of Immortals. Hardy, Galsworthy, Conrad, they live among us still, and move us always by qualities of genius which time cannot stale. These sketches possess in a rare degree the accent of the spoken word, the salty flavour of a worth-while personality gossiping to himself about memorable incidents.

Here is a rich fund of anecdotes; about that inveterate veteran, H. G. Wells; about Kipling, Barrie, Chesterton, and, not least, the irrepressible Shaw. The reader is re-introduced to Max Beerbohm, Noel Coward and many others.

This book is as delightful a gallery of intimate portraits as has ever been made public and its value is heightened by a series of clever foils in the caricatures by Conrado Massaguer.

Illustrated 12s. 6d.

General Fiction

By *Frank Swinnerton*

ELIZABETH

Author of "The Georgian House" (7th imp.), etc.

Elizabeth is the longest and richest book yet written by Mr. Swinnerton. Its background is that coastal town of Seahampton which was visited from Sandersfold by the characters in *The Georgian House*, and the history of Seahampton plays an important part in the story. The story itself covers a long period, but it is not a chronicle novel of the usual type, for it is a dramatic tale of jealousy which at the same time concerns itself with a curious psychological problem. Many characters appear, so that *Elizabeth* herself is seen from a number of different angles and in relation to all kinds of strange and interesting experiences. 7s. 6d.

By *George Woden*

LOVE AND LET LOVE

Author of "Mungo", etc.

"A MOVING and passionate tale, written with gravity and restraint, and with a beautifully exact observation of nature and humanity." So Mr. Compton Mackenzie wrote of *Mungo*, which achieved so great a success. In *Love and Let Love* readers will find the same qualities and a greater dramatic force. The scene is an historic English village near a cathedral town, at the present time. The characters are city-bred Scots, from Glasgow, and both Saint Modwen and the Devil play active parts in the conflicts of flesh and spirit, reason and unreason, time and chance, which make the story. 7s. 6d.

By *Ethel Boileau* WHEN YELLOW LEAVES . . .

Author of "Turnip Tops" (21st thous.), etc.

AFTER many months of publication, *Turnip Tops* is still one of the merriest sellers of the last few years. "It is an event in a reviewer's life," wrote Mr. Cecil Roberts; ". . . here," he continued, "is a truly exquisite piece of work. It is so good that the story really does not matter."

And now Ethel Boileau's new novel, *When Yellow Leaves . . .* Great things are expected of it, and we are quite convinced that no expectations will be disappointed.

Ethel Boileau tells the story of the passing of an order, the ruin of a family living on and by "the land"; the helplessness of a man bred in the old order to stand up against the complexities of modern life, or to understand his children, who are of the new world which is strange to him. The story is one of conflict—not only between Sir Anthony Vane and the forces which finally overwhelm him, but also between him and his sons Michael and Derrick.

Against the background of the English countryside, sketched as unerringly as in *Turnip Tops*, this story is told, with its wealth of detail, and its moving, vital plot. 7s. 6d.

By *Robert Hichens*

THE GARDENIA AND OTHER STORIES

Author of "Dr. Artz" (5th imp.), "The Garden of Allah", etc.

A VOLUME of stories by Mr. Hichens is an event. Very few living writers combine so thoroughly and completely the very different arts of the novelist and the short-story writer. All the stories in this volume are in Mr. Hichens' best vein; models of their kind in technique, they cover a wide field and contain a long gallery of vivid characters. 7s. 6d.

General Fiction

By *Eden Phillpotts* THE OLDEST INHABITANT

Author of "The Farmer's Wife", "Yellow Sands", "Witch's Cauldron", etc.

WITH his beloved Devonshire as his background, and with a lifelong experience of its native's character as his material, Mr. Phillpotts gives us here one of the most charming and penetrating novels that he has ever written. Ned, the village Communist, called his old Grandfer "a silly old blue-bottle", but, be that as it may, the old man holds the stage in this story and will remain in the minds of readers more tolerant than young Ned, as one of the most memorable of the characters created by Mr. Phillpotts in a long series of brilliant achievements.

This story, as the "silly old blue-bottle" said himself, is the meeting of two generations and a new presentation of the old story of a bigoted father and discontented children.

7s. 6d.

By *Ursula Bloom*

PASTORAL

Author of "Wonder Cruise", "An April After", "Tarnish", etc.

URSULA BLOOM lived in the heart of the wilds for many years. In this novel she has gone back to her own country, and she tells the story of the beauty of that country and of the destroying force which lies behind that beauty. She tells the life history of Alan Drew, a brilliant young man who, taking Orders, finds city life too hard, and takes the country living. He believes that he will find there the inspiration he desires. The whole parish holds him. Things are not as he expected. The old fire dies; the War comes; his family grow to manhood and to womanhood and presently he, growing old and with his brilliance befogged, dies. For thirty years he had lived in the heart of rustic England and, in that tide of tranquil beauty, lost everything.

Pastoral is a revealing and a devastating story written with a passionate sincerity and a skill which is bringing to Ursula Bloom increasing recognition as a novelist of real importance.

7s. 6d.

By *Cosmo Hamilton*

SPLENDOUR OF
TORCHES

Author of "Caste", "Pleasure House", etc.

A NEW novel by Cosmo Hamilton is always an event of importance to an ever increasing public. In *Splendour of Torches* he has written what is, without question, his finest and most vital novel, and it is easy to prophesy that the gallantry and courage of the Falconer family in facing the difficult problems of keeping their heads above water in the days in which we live will put them into readers' hearts as their very inspiring friends. He tells an absorbing story with great emotional power, and with chapters of such beauty that he earns our gratitude.

7s. 6d.

By *Eileen Tremayne*

PAUL AND MICHAEL

Author of "Quatrain" (3rd imp.)

"MISS TREMAYNE is clearly a writer whose talents, when further developed, will create for her a wide public." Thus the *Daily Telegraph* in review of Miss Tremayne's brilliant and successful first novel, *Quatrain*, which will surely have lingered in the memories of all who read it.

Paul and Michael is as brilliant and as promising a second novel as was *Quatrain* a first. It tells the story of two friends whose lives and characters, so different and so diverse, interweave and remain interwoven by indefinable yet irrevocable bonds.

Both Paul, brilliant, and Michael, solid, attain the inevitable successes and failures of life. In their characters and in their lives, they will be found in this book full of interest, etched sharply and with thorough understanding.

7s. 6d.

General Fiction



By *Stephen McKenna*

THE UNDISCOVERED COUNTRY

*Author of "Sonia", "The Secret Victory", "The Magic Quest",
"Namesakes", etc.*

A NEW novel by Mr. McKenna is an event which always arouses interest. So wide his range over life, so challenging are the situations in which he places his characters, and so vivid and dramatic is his story-telling, that his readers are always certain of entertainment and stimulation. *The Undiscovered Country* is an ingenious and dramatic novel whose publication will be eagerly awaited.

7s. 6d.

By *Marjorie Stewart*

COFFEE AT ELEVEN

Author of "Adam Square", "Mysterious Way"

WE are still in the same city as in *Mysterious Way* and *Adam Square*, but we do not, in this third novel of Marjorie Stewart's, meet any of the old friends. Instead we get a glimpse of life as epitomized by the various types of human being who forgather in any big restaurant for coffee at eleven: the woman surgeon, now an invalid and prevented from completing her life work; her niece Mélanie; University students; hospital nurses; housewives; business men; the strangers who come and go; we meet them all at this morning ceremony.

Coffee at Eleven is a very human story, the most ambitious that Marjorie Stewart has yet written, and likely, we think, to prove the most popular as well.

7s. 6d.



By *Vivian Ellis*

FAINT HARMONY

Author of "Zelma" (3rd imp.)

"It seems to me," wrote Cecil Roberts of Mr. Ellis' brilliant and triumphant first novel, *Zelma*, "that he is as much at home on the keys of his typewriter as on those of his piano." And indeed it does now seem that Mr. Ellis is to make as great a name for himself as a novelist as he has already as a composer.

Faint Harmony is a finer novel in every way than was *Zelma*. In it Mr. Ellis turns his attention to music and musicians, and not only portrays the struggle of a great composer with sympathetic insight, but interweaves, like a counter-melody to this romance of the musical world, vivid pictures of Continental domestic life from the 'eighties until the present day. 7s. 6d.

By *Emmeline Morrison*

LEITH OF WILLOW
HALL

Author of "Jack Rivers' Wife", "Swept by the Tide", etc.

IN giving us her twenty-fifth novel in the comparatively short space of twelve years, Emmeline Morrison has established herself as one of the most prolific as well as popular novelists of the present day. More than anything is her success due to the consistent originality of her stories. She never forgets that "the story's the thing", and, as in all her novels, the story of *Leith of Willow Hall* persists from the first page to the last. The romantic love of Lenore Garland for Nicholas Gaye, a kindred spirit of her own generation, continuing even after her forced marriage to Hugh Leith, a wealthy man some twenty years older than herself and with a grown-up daughter, creates a position which enables Emmeline Morrison to tell a story of great interest and human emotion.

It is only at the end that Lenore makes her choice, in most dramatic circumstances, between the love of her girlhood and her husband. 7s. 6d.

General Fiction

By *Johannes Buchholtz*

SUSANNE

Translated by Edwin Bjorkman

IN the Inter-Scandinavian Novel Contest, this novel won the first Danish prize, as *Two Living and One Dead* by Sigurd Christiansen won the first Norwegian prize. Not only is it a penetrating picture of present-day Denmark and its modern young people, it is an absorbing story of the young girl Susanne, her rise from humble surroundings to the complexities of sophisticated upper-class life.

The introduction of Danish literature touching upon contemporary life in that country has been scanty over here. So the background and customs portrayed in *Susanne* have their own fresh quality, while the problems involved are common to human beings all over the world. The baker's daughter who resists seduction by the son of a wealthy shipowner and then becomes his bride, only to find that marriage and children do not necessarily fortify a man and woman's relationship, is a heroine of universal appeal. 7s. 6d.

By *Frederic Arnold Kummer*

RED CLAY

Author of "Forbidden Wine", "Ladies in Hades", etc.

VERY charming and picturesque and eminently readable is this story of three unemployed American citizens who tramp the roads, treating their misfortunes with scant respect and taking cheerfulness into the lives of many they meet on their way.

There is the tramp with his love of literature and music ; the young girl who was a commercial free-lance artist and who gives marionette performances with her self-made toy theatre ; and an ex-bank clerk who is pursued by a wealthy woman.

A little reminiscent of the late W. J. Locke's *Beloved Vagabond* and with a flavouring of J. B. Priestley's *Good Companions*, this novel will assuredly win its way to success and do much to enhance the reputation of its author. 7s. 6d.

General Fiction

By *Simon Dare*

APRIL WHIRLWIND

Author of "Blind Madonna", "Sea Drift," etc.

SIMON DARE has set her new story in a tiny village on the north coast of Somerset and in it writes of Penelope and her widowed mother, of their money losses philosophically encountered and of the girl's gradual realization, after one or two mistakes, as to which is the man of importance in her life.

We meet, too, in this story, the beautiful Ariadne, butterfly charmer, fighting with a certain blind courage against the decree of Fate; the dying artist in his bungalow on the cliff who is reprieved by a miracle of science; Ben Carruthers, harassed by conflicting loyalties, and many others.

But, dominating and challenging throughout the book, is the spirit of Youth with its highest passion for achievement, its courage, its independence and its loyalty; its whirlwind virility, its gallant adventuring. 7s. 6d.

By *Netta Muskett*

A MIRROR FOR DREAMS

Author of "Plaster Cast", "The Open Window", etc.

IN Netta Muskett's delightful new romance we meet

Philip Vale, part materialist, part dreamer, who is recalled from his aimless wanderings to take control of a famous London newspaper which he has inherited. To it he brings his dreams and ideals for a truthful and fearless Press which he believes will be the saving of his country.

In the background of his life, impinging on it casually in the first place and becoming irrevocably grafted upon it, is Eve, neither wife, mistress, nor friend.

Thrusting aside as negligible the intimate and personal side of life, he throws himself enthusiastically into his work, and when he finds that the world neither understands nor desires the fulfilment of his dreams, bitterness almost destroys his soul. Suddenly, however, he realizes, through Eve's suffering and his own, that their life together is the reality and his dreams but the reflection in a mirror. 7s. 6d.

By *V. Veresayev*

THE SISTERS

(Translated from the Russian)

DR. VERESAYEV, a medical practitioner, was a prominent writer under the old Russian régime.

In *The Sisters* this thoughtful and conscientious observer of life reveals to the reader, with penetration and art, the lives of two sisters in Soviet Russia. Beautiful and gifted girls, their ideal was to live and think as genuine members of the proletariat, unswerving pupils of Lenin and devoted workers in their cause. Their thoughts, feelings, mental and spiritual struggles, and love affairs are given in a style simple and attractive.

The Sisters is one of the most readable and illuminating of novels that have emerged from the Soviet. 7s. 6d.

By *Andrew Soutar*

MONEY SPINNERS

Author of "The Hanging Sword", "Hagar Called Hannah", etc.

THERE is a collection of stories which Mr. Soutar calls 'grim and human'. How grim and how human Mr. Soutar can be those who have read his novels will appreciate. Every one of the stories in this volume are perfect examples of Mr. Soutar's art and versatility and they provide an entertainment against which it would be hard to compete. 7s. 6d.

SALLY IN A SERVICE FLAT

An amusing light-hearted romance

by

MABEL BARNES-GRUNDY

Author of "Two in a Tent and Jane", "Candytuft—I Mear Veronica", etc.

7s. 6d.

General Fiction

By *Maboth Moseley*

WAR UPON WOMEN

Author of "God Created Them Apart", etc.

IF war broke out at the present time, what would you do? A terrible question which every one of us might have to answer in no distant future.

In *War Upon Women*, Maboth Moseley, one of the most brilliant and controversial of the younger novelists, has answered this very question on behalf of a retired English Colonel, his wife, his daughter, his servants and a young pacifist. Her principal aim is to show what will happen to women in the event of another war. It has happened all down the ages, but most people find it convenient to forget. *War Upon Women* jogs the memory. 7s. 6d.

By *David Grew*

THE WEREWOLF OF
EDMONTON

Author of "The Sorrell Stallion."

NO one who loves horses should have missed David Grew's autobiography of *The Sorrell Stallion* which, upon its publication last autumn, was acclaimed as a natural successor to *Black Beauty*. And no one who loves dogs should now miss this biography of one of the most attractive puppies who have ever scampered into the pages of a book.

Here is that rare thing, a dog-book which does not sentimentalize or wax facetious, attributing to the dog human thoughts or characteristics. But it describes all his emotions and gropings towards thought and co-ordination of impulses from birth. The puppy's experiences with wild animals, his sorrows and joys, his gradual realization that life is not all petting and food, hold the interest in a remarkable degree. 7s. 6d.

By *Margaret Baillie Saunders*

FEATURING
ELISA

A brilliantly entertaining new novel by the author of "A Mayoress's Wooing", "John O'Chimes", etc. 7s. 6d.

Hutchinson's "First Novel" Library

The success of our First Novel Library has exceeded our most optimistic hopes. Each of the novels published in it has taken its place amongst the great mass of Autumn publications and has won attention and recognition. Below are listed those novels to be published during the Spring. The announcement of this Library resulted in an almost embarrassing deluge of first novels descending upon us, and we feel confident that those of them we have accepted represent the finest selection of first novels that has been issued for many years.

By *Ellen Gatti*

WAYFARING WOMEN

(*First Novel Library, No. 8*)

"THIS is a most enchanting book," writes one of the most critical of our literary advisers of this first novel ; "it may be highly improbable, but what does that matter? Sufficient surely that it is delightful entertainment, with swift-moving adventure of an unhackneyed type ; enough delicate sentiment and romance to be wholly pleasing ; and a thoroughly good plot, the threads of which are skilfully woven together into a harmonious whole with a delightful ending. I can best describe it in a schoolboy phrase as being a 'simply ripping' book."

That is high praise indeed, but fully deserved, as everyone who reads the novel will agree.

The story is set, for the main, in Africa, and the local colour is vividly and brilliantly portrayed. One finds here adventure, romance and, above all, a new writer of exceptional promise.

7s. 6d.

By *Prudence Summerhayes*

COBWEB CHILD

(*First Novel Library, No. 9*)

THIS is Prudence Summerhayes' first novel. Her fresh and delicate touch will win your sympathy, will quicken your interest, and you will write down her name for future reference.

The chief character in her novel is a rambling Tudor house. Its individuality haunts the story and entices one ingeniously away from all the tiresome, everyday things that harass the mind, into a remote and sleepy part of the quiet English countryside.

7s. 6d.

First Novel Library

By *Aubrey Boyd*

NO MAN'S WOMAN
(*First Novel Library, No. 10*)

EVEN the most fastidious mystery fan will find in this book that long-sought-for something different—something refreshing in the telling—and diverting in the colour and plot—of this mighty mystery drama of the North. The story is told by "Scott" himself; it is fresh with the trailsmen's lore, the long silent mushing, the instinct of animals for the "Back trail", and the inexplicable white madness which the North puts into men's blood. 6s.

By *Kathleen Erskine*

DESIGN
(*First Novel Library, No. 11*)

THERE can be no doubt as to the rare brilliance of this first novel. In Kathleen Erskine's portrayal of character there is to be found that richness of detail, that acute perception which gives not only individuality, but definite personality as well. "Galsworthy himself," writes a critic to whom the manuscript was submitted, "would have found these people entirely sympathetic. They are men and women of high ideals, fastidious personal relationships and perfect breeding."

The story is chiefly one of character and has for its background a long and bitter lawsuit in which father and son hold opposing briefs. But the book is more immediately concerned with Eric Knight, a brilliant young journalist, whose fine sensitiveness and keen intellect are gradually ensnared and dulled by the deliberate emotional influence of Lilius More, whose whole existence is "designed" to the smooth ease of a lovely egotism. 7s. 6d.

By *Sheila FitzGerald* HUNGARIAN RHAPSODY

(*First Novel Library*, No. 12)

It is not often that publishers' readers are unanimous in their verdicts upon the manuscripts submitted to them. But there is no doubt about their unanimous enthusiasm over this first novel. Each of them stresses, above all other qualities, those of freshness of style and clarity of expression.

The scene of the story is laid in Hungary, in the pine forest country and in the beautiful capital itself, and it concerns the conflict which entered the family of Ehrenfeld who, undisturbed by the consequences of the war, reigned almost as feudal lords over their domain. The home of the Ehrenfelds was set deep in the valley of the Toras, where the children grew up under the tuition of Fraulein Kock who, besides being governess, assumed most of the responsibility of the home. The characterization is unusually vivid, and the reader becomes immersed in the atmosphere and all the gay doings of the children, until tragedy touches them and converts their world into one of conflict.

Hungarian Rhapsody is a novel of outstanding quality and will find its way into the affections of all who read it.

7s. 6d.



First novels published during the Autumn

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|--|----------------------------|
| No. 1. SISTERS' CHILDREN | <i>Mary F. Codd</i> |
| No. 2. BELOVED STRANGER | <i>Marleon Shrager</i> |
| No. 3. ROAST BEEF ON SUNDAY | <i>Rosalind Le Fleming</i> |
| No. 4. BRASS AND CYMBALS | <i>Jean Campbell</i> |
| No. 5. SHIP'S MAGIC | <i>Jill Spencer</i> |
| No. 6. NOW RESTS THAT UNQUIET
HEART | <i>Jean Cooke</i> |
| No. 7. THE KINDLY GODS | <i>Eileen Dwyer</i> |

Historical Fiction

By E. O. Browne

A KINGDOM DIVIDED

Author of "Fair Age of Youth", "The Green Eagle", etc.

A LETTER hastily scrawled by the seneschal of Gascony to the King of England is the foundation of this vivid and thrilling romance of thirteenth-century France—a land torn between the hereditary rights of King Edward in London and the overlordship of King Philip in Paris.

No writer of historical romance more faithfully reproduces the glamour of past days than Miss E. O. Browne ; and no writer has a more quickly growing or a more enthusiastic following. 7s. 6d.

7s. 6d.

By Una L. Silberrad THE STRANGE STORY OF
THE FALCONER PAPERS

Author of "The Will of James Mark Crane"

IMAGINE, for a moment, that you are back in the eighteenth century and at Marseilles. The scene is set on a galley ship lying in the harbour. The sun beats on the bare backs of weary-muscled galley slaves, but for the moment they are resting. Three of these men escape, and the story of their escape and their discovery of the house in the woods and their ensuing adventures is as thrilling as anything that Una Silberrad has yet written.

7s. 6d.

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By J. G. Sarasin

THE PIRATE'S PACK

Author of "Across the Border" (3rd imp.)

OUT of the sea-mist came Bartolomeo Chavarria to woo a fugitive girl. But, before he landed, there was found in his ship a chest of gold which incriminated him. The young lovers fled away from the coast and sheltered in the Vale of Whittingham, but once again misfortune descended upon them and the girl disappeared upon her wedding day.

How she escaped from her captors, how she found her lover and the treasure again and how she solved the tragic mystery is all told in this romance of the north country during the Stuart times. 7s. 6d.

7s. 6d.

Adventure and Thrills!

By *Dennis Wheatley*

BLACK AUGUST

*Author of "The Forbidden Territory" (7th imp.),
"Such Power is Dangerous" (5th imp.)*

THIS is the story of the General Crash that may yet come to England in a few years' time. Panic, fear, street fighting—the general exodus from the cities to the doubtful safety of the countryside.

Through this enormous canvas move the figures of the young and debonair candidate for Mid-Suffolk in the interests of the United British Party; his sister, the mad, irresponsible, and altogether delightful Lady Veronica Wherleadale; the cynical egoist Gregory Sallust, journalist, and the lovely typist, Ann Croom; together with a host of well-chosen minor characters. How they fought and tumbled—and yet found time for love and laughter during this terrible upheaval—is portrayed by a series of amazingly vivid pictures in this long 120,000-word romance, every page of which is packed with incident and thrills. 7s. 6d.

By *Mark Channing*

WHITE PYTHON

Author of "King Cobra".

WITH his first novel Mark Channing achieved a remarkable and unusual success. "Thrill," wrote *The Morning Post*, "is almost too tame a word to apply to King Cobra . . . one cannot but admire the author's full-blooded, galloping style. He knows his India, and we suspect that he could weave many an exhilarating tale about the North West."

Everyone who has read Mr. Channing's second novel will know that the *Morning Post* suspects quite rightly. For Mr. Channing has woven another incredibly exciting and swift-moving tale of the North West. More terrifying, more uncanny even than *King Cobra*, the *White Python* proceeds through the pages of the novel with devastating effect. 7s. 6d.

Adventure and Thrills !

By *Arthur Mills*

THE ANT HEAP

Author of "The Apache Girl", "Pursued", "White Snake", etc.

SHE lay on the sofa, looking at John Gage, District Commissioner of Baptoi. A wonderful lover, she thought ; pity he has to go back to that outlandish place and they might never meet again. . . .

"We're just like ants," she said, "so busy all the time struggling for food, fighting for mates, pushing things aside, and then, just as we have everything organized, someone comes along and puts his foot in the middle of us."

Puppets on the end of a string ; ants scurrying along a trail, call them what you will, these are the people of this curious, startling novel. The Gold Coast provides the setting ; it is a grim country at times ; but it is not until one comes to the last crawl to the last well, that anybody knows what anybody else is like. . . .

Strange, challenging, full of adventure, this novel is an achievement far beyond anything that Arthur Mills has yet written. 7s. 6d.

By *Johnston McCulley* THE RANGE CAVALIER

Author of "The Flaming Stallion", "Black Star", Black Star's Return", etc.

A SMASHING, roaring, Western yarn filled with cyclonic action. There is, however, something more than just the thrill that follows in the wake of a gun's roar, as this story is of men of the West, keyed up to all of life's emotions by their daily routine of touch and go. Johnston McCulley has written his best story of the lives, loves, hates and the human heart of the people of the Arizona cattle country. 7s. 6d.

Adventure and Thrills !

By *W. Robert Foran*

DRUMS OF SACRIFICE

Author of "The Border of Blades", "Roshanara of the Seven Cities", "Kill : or be Killed"

W. ROBERT FORAN'S first two novels had an Indian setting; now he finds his stage in Africa, the mysterious and inscrutable. The *Morning Post* said of *Roshanara of the Seven Cities*, "Major Foran's pictures of plot and counter-plot . . . are drawn with an effortless certainty which shows his knowledge of the material in which he works." The same is equally true of his latest novel. He has spent the greater part of the past thirty-five years in various portions of Africa, and knows intimately his stage and players.

None of the world's criminologists could explain why Sir Hugh Woolston suddenly became insane and murdered his favourite brother, a month after their return from eighteen months in Eastern Africa. The mystery was as baffling as the unread enigma of the great Zimbabwe ruins in Southern Rhodesia—which, incidentally, have a great bearing on the story. 7s. 6d.

By *Talbot Mundy*

THE RED FLAME OF
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